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I

THE INSPIRATION OF PROPHECY

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# THE INSPIRATION OF PROPHECY

AN ESSAY IN THE PSYCHOLOGY  
OF REVELATION

BY

G. C. JOYCE, D.D.

WARDEN OF S. DEINIOL'S LIBRARY, AND EXAMINING CHAPLAIN  
TO THE BISHOP OF S. ASAPH

Πιστεύομεν εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον τὸ λαλήσαν  
διὰ τῶν προφητῶν

ΠΙΣΤΕΥΟΜΕΝ ΕΙΣ ΤΟ ΠΝΕΥΜΑ ΤΟ ἍΓΙΟΝ ΤΟ ΛΑΛΗΣΑΝ  
ΔΙΑ ΤΩΝ ΠΡΟΦΗΤΩΝ

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## PREFACE

THIS little book contains the substance of lectures delivered to the members of the Society of Sacred Study in the Dioceses of S. Asaph and Bangor. Within the narrow compass of its few pages there is obviously no pretence to completeness of treatment. I have desired only to make some suggestions for further thought and study.

It will probably be admitted in all quarters that in view of recent developments of human thought some modifications need to be introduced into the traditional expression of the doctrine of Inspiration. Such a restatement demands a re-examination of the pertinent facts, and, in order to be satisfactory, must be placed in logical connexion with the first principles of a philosophy of revelation. Into these matters I do not venture to enter, but have restricted myself to the modest preliminary task of attempting to describe some of the phenomena of Inspiration, as observed from the standpoint of the psychology of religion. Recognizing and accepting the reality and authority of the revelation enshrined in the Bible, I am convinced that the fullest and freest inquiry into the various modes of Inspiration, so far from weakening faith, cannot but serve to increase our reverence for this work of the Holy Spirit among men.





# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. PROPHECY THE CHIEF MODE OF INSPIRATION	I
II. DIVINATION IN EARLY HEBREW RELIGION .	12
III. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DIVINATION . . .	26
IV. TRANSITION FROM DIVINATION TO PROPHECY	46
V. THE PROPHETIC EXCITATION: ITS PSYCHO- LOGICAL CONDITIONS . . . . .	60
VI. PROPHETIC AUDITION . . . . .	74
VII. PROPHETIC VISION IN AMOS AND ISAIAH .	90
VIII. PROPHETIC VISION IN JEREMIAH AND EZEKIEL	106
IX. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FALSE PROPHECY .	123
X. THE GIFT OF PROPHECY AT PENTECOST .	138
XI. TONGUES AND THEIR INTERPRETATION IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH . . . . .	152
XII. PROPHECY IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH .	168
XIII. THE SPIRITS OF THE PROPHETS . . . .	181



## CHAPTER I

### PROPHECY THE CHIEF MODE OF INSPIRATION

OF recent years much attention has been paid to the study of the psychology of religion. For the most part the investigation has concerned itself with those interesting but obscure processes whereby religious conviction is transmitted from mind to mind, and establishes itself in the heart of the believer. In other words, the subject of inquiry has been mainly the psychology of conversion. Comparatively speaking, the psychology of Inspiration remains an almost untrodden field. And yet it is one that invites exploration. Conversion is the appropriation by the individual of spiritual truth already familiar to others, Inspiration the communication of something new to the world at large. If in the one case careful observation of psychological phenomena has to some extent revealed the conditions of the crisis in the individual life, in the other also it is possible that a similar method of inquiry may throw some light upon the transmission to man in the first instance of new fragments of divine knowledge. Revelation, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews impresses upon his readers, has been imparted to the fathers in sundry portions and diverse manners. That the process of communication has been marked throughout by an extraordinary variety none will deny. Yet the recognition of this undoubted truth is entirely



consistent with the hope that beneath the variety it may be possible to trace the working of some persistent and fixed principles. It is at least conceivable that the study of man's mental capacity for the reception of new religious truth may disclose the presence of some constant factors in religious genius, some uniform peculiarities of religious temperament present in all those who have been selected by the Holy Spirit to be the medium of a revelation.

In an inquiry of this kind the main source of information will naturally be the personal records of revelation. From this point of view their multiformity is an immense advantage. In the divine library of the Bible we are provided with the first-hand narratives of a large number of inspired persons, diverse from one another in a hundred ways, yet alike in this, that through each one of them some fragment of spiritual truth was for the first time published to the world. It will be the purpose of our inquiry to search these records with a view to discovering something as to the conditions under which the mind of man has apprehended the Divine message.

Prophecy is one of the most important of the distinguishing features of revealed religion. The religion of Israel possessed an immeasurable advantage over the faiths of the neighbouring tribes in being the appointed sphere of the working of 'men of God'. Again, at a later period in the history of the world the renewal of the gift of prophecy was the outward and visible proof of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The supreme value of the gift lay in the fact that it was the driving power of that onward and upward movement which is the incontrovertible evidence of life. The knowledge of God is like other

knowledge in never remaining stationary. It cannot be transmitted in fixed quantity from one generation to another. There is no escape from the alternative, progress or retrogression, growth or shrinkage, development or decay. And it was through prophecy that the impetus of advance was imparted ; the prophet was the man through whom ' God gave the increase '. He was, in fact, the standing example of the principle that in religion no less than in all matters of practical life men are dependent on the services of others. Mediation is a universal law. Men cannot be all alike the discoverers of their own religion, any more than they can be the discoverers of their secular knowledge. In both cases they inherit an accumulation from the past, but what they learn from others they verify for themselves in their own experience. Yet something beyond verification there must be on occasions. And if religious and secular knowledge is to increase, there must be from time to time discoveries and revelations. In tracing out the history of religious belief we can certainly distinguish certain points where new truth has come in and some addition has been made to the common stock. How then has it come ? It would be against all analogy to suppose that the same truth has presented itself simultaneously to a number of different minds. To one man first comes the new thought, the new conception, the new interpretation, in order that by him it may be communicated to his fellows. He is the prophet, the teacher of his generation, the builder who lays another stone on the walls of the temple of wisdom. In some cases while the truth gains currency, the memory of its original promulgator passes into oblivion ; in others, his fame remains an imperishable monument.

Whatever interpretation we choose to put upon the fact, it cannot be denied that for a period extending over several centuries the Hebrew religion was carried forward from stage to stage of development by a succession of gifted men, themselves the heirs of a great tradition and each adding in his turn his quota of fresh revelation. These men are the conspicuous and eminent examples in whose writings we may expect to find the peculiar features of prophetic inspiration more manifestly present and more easily discoverable than elsewhere. Not that every prophet was *ipso facto* an author. We know of several who never wrote a line, or whose writings have entirely disappeared. And doubtless there were many others whose very names are now lost to us. Yet even of these forgotten prophets it may be said that some record of their work remains imbedded in the religious history of the Jewish nation. What was the nature of their endowment we may partially infer from our knowledge of the results which they produced. It is a point worth making, for it will prevent us from falling into the mistake of supposing that the nature of prophetic inspiration can be adequately studied without going outside the limits of the prophetic books. While that literature is, of course, incomparably the most important witness, neither is it the only evidence, nor can it be rightly appreciated except when taken in its historical context. In the development of the national religious life prophecy was a constantly present and constantly active factor, of which the extant prophetic writings are the merest fragmentary survivals. A theory of prophetic inspiration, if it is to be at all satisfactory, must fit not only the data of written prophecy as they lie before us in Scripture,



but account also for those other facts which we gather from allusions in the historical books, or infer from a comparison of the religion of Israel with other religions.

For although prophecy in the fullest sense of the word is indeed peculiar to revealed religion, yet is there something analogous to it beyond the pale. There is a wider sense in which prophecy is always present wherever and whenever men are feeling after God. The succession of the prophets is unbroken. As they have been since the world began, so will they continue to the world's end. God has not left Himself without witness. The evidence of natural religion, the rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, the simple joys of the normal human life are before the eyes of all men alike. But there have always been some endowed beyond their fellows with the capacity to see, whose ears are naturally more open to the message, and whose understanding is quicker to comprehend its meaning. So far as they respond to the obligation which the possession of these advantages imposes upon them, they become the prophets of natural religion. And on examination the analogy between their function and that of the inspired prophets of revealed religion is found to be both close and true, notwithstanding the inferiority of their spiritual endowment. And even in this matter the resemblance is more than superficial. In both the particular quality which raises them above their contemporaries is the gift of God, although in the one case only is the action of the Holy Spirit so potent and so comprehensive as to have received the name of revelation. So long as this distinction be neither blurred nor disregarded, it can involve no disparagement of the superiority attaching to Hebrew and Christian prophecy, if we direct our

attention to those points which natural and inspired prophecy seem to have in common. And because the natural precedes the spiritual, our most convenient course will be to consider the prophetic faculty first in its lower and simpler manifestations, and afterwards to ask what heights it may reach under the control of the indwelling Spirit of God.

That man as man is actually capable of acquiring spiritual knowledge is the great presupposition of all religious belief. It is our human privilege to be able to see beyond the horizon of this world, and, however dimly and indistinctly, to be conscious of contact with spiritual realities. Like every other faculty, this one may in some cases be absent through congenital defect. Prolonged disuse will always bring about its atrophy. On the other hand, constant exercise will ensure an expansion to which no definite limit can be set. Granting the possibility of this continuous upward growth of the spiritual faculty we may reasonably look upon the inspired insight of the prophet as the natural power of spiritual vision raised to a higher intensity, and operating in a realm whither the ordinary man has no access. What can be said in favour of this theory will appear later. It is sufficient at the present moment to point out that upon this assumption there will be an organic relation between the psychology of Inspiration and the psychology of religious belief. The former will not be something altogether apart and distinct, *sui generis*, with laws and principles of its own, but will exhibit on a larger and more impressive scale the same activities as come into play in the religious life of common men. That in Inspiration there is present another and a peculiar factor, viz. the special influence of the Holy Spirit, is not for a moment denied ;

but our contention is, that this influence is exercised not through some altogether inexplicable interposition, but through the strengthening and the exaltation of those human faculties without which there would be no religion at all among men. If so, we may infer the existence of an analogy between the inspiration of the prophet and the specially vivid consciousness of spiritual things which is distinctive of the saint. The one will illustrate the other. The working of the mind of the prophet will be rendered more intelligible through the comparison which it will be possible to establish with that of the saint. The procedure is justified by the fact that the similarities between the two are not merely accidental but arise from a fundamental identity. In both the same forces are at work acting under the control of the same psychological laws.

There is also another class of facts of a very different kind, which in this connexion deserves to be brought under review. Of recent years the study of psychical research has succeeded in establishing important conclusions with regard to the existence in man of faculties extending beyond the limitations of the normal consciousness. To take a single example, the reality of telepathy can no longer be denied in face of the quantity and quality of evidence which can be produced. Nor can we shut our eyes to the fact of some degree of correspondence between these strange psychic operations and some of the phenomena of prophecy. Very possibly the proposal to draw a parallel between prophetic Inspiration and supposed psychical extravagances will not be accepted without demur. Does it not, it will be said, reduce the two things to the same level, explaining away prophecy as a mere psychological occurrence? But although some

hesitation be natural, it is likely to be removed by a little further consideration. In this matter it is of particular importance to remember that the mode by which a given result has been achieved may be discussed without prejudice to the further question as to the identity of the agent. Much of the confusion of the controversy about evolution was due to a forgetfulness of this distinction. It took more than a few years to establish the sufficiently obvious conclusion that a full belief in the agency of God as Creator was equally consistent with either theory as to the way in which He carried out His design, whether by slow and continuous changes, or by sudden exercises of His power. If this be true of evolution in general, it is true also of the evolution of religion and the evolution of prophecy. Man's religion is none the less a divine revelation though it may be shown to have grown out of the savage and crude superstitions of barbarous tribes. Similarly the hypothesis of the evolution of prophecy out of lower elements neither excludes nor reduces our recognition of the hand of God in the matter. No account of the history of its origin will impair our estimate of its supreme value to the world. If God has made man's body out of humbler forms of life, He may equally well have made the prophet's mind out of humbler psychical elements. If an arboreal creature be man's ancestor in the physical line, why should we fear to recognize the soothsayer and the diviner as the ancestor of the prophet in the line of mental and spiritual development? No slur or slight will thereby be cast upon prophecy. For everything has a right to be judged by what it is in itself in its completed state, not by what it was in some earlier stages of its physical or spiritual existence, still less by what its physical

or spiritual progenitors may have been. Let prophecy be valued on its merits. The justice of its claim to be a divine message to the world is to be decided in accordance with the evidence of what it has accomplished, not by reference to a history of its origin.

What then, it will perhaps be asked, is the purpose to be served by an investigation into the first beginnings of prophecy, and by the attempt to trace its connexion with earlier and cruder spiritual manifestations? To this question the succeeding pages of this book will, I hope, provide an answer. Here it will be sufficient to say that a study of this kind, without professing to be a royal road to the discovery of the inner meaning of prophecy, may yet contribute something towards the elucidation of what may be called the mechanism of prophecy. Just as men can only speak or hear in virtue of their possession of the requisite mental and physical equipment for these functions, so man can only prophecy in virtue of some corresponding spiritual organization. There must be some means of communication between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man. There must be something in the nature of a spiritual ear fitted to catch the divine message; and just as the physical ear has advanced in delicacy of perception and complexity of structure, so we may believe that there has been a corresponding advance in man's capacity for spiritual perception. We believe it possible to trace a development, both in the means of communication employed by the Spirit of God and in the measure of man's receptivity. In prophecy this development is completed. Yet there is no absolute break or division. Vision and dream and trance continue to be the modes by which the prophetic inspiration is conveyed, and may be made the subject



of inquiry in themselves apart from the contents of the message. These psychic experiences are the means of the communication of revelation very much as language is the means of the communication of thought ; and precisely as the study of the growth of language made possible through the science of comparative philology is admittedly a necessary preparation to the exegesis of our sacred books, so some knowledge of the growth and development of the religious consciousness may render valuable aid in the interpretation of prophecy. References to visions, for example, are very frequent in the prophetic writings. In seeking to arrive at the prophet's meaning, it may be of no small advantage to know something about the mental conditions of abnormal psychic states. The requisite information must be looked for not only in the Bible, but also in secular sources.

What has been said will be sufficient to indicate the limits of our inquiry, about which it is necessary to obviate any possibility of misunderstanding. Our study of inspiration will be concerned not with the thing perceived, but with the way of perceiving it. Increase of knowledge with regard to the means of perception will not, we may be sure, shake our confidence in the objective truth of revelation. It may, however, warn us to be on our guard in certain directions against ascribing reality to subjective features belonging to particular presentations of the truth. A simple and obvious analogy may serve to make the point clearer. From our knowledge of the construction of the human eye, we may conclude that it is as an instrument subject to certain limitations and possibilities of error, but the very possession of this knowledge will increase rather than diminish our confidence in its use.

It will enable us also to know what measure of necessary precaution to take, and how best to secure the elimination of error. We are certainly under no apprehension that knowledge of the mechanism of ordinary vision will undermine our confidence in the reality of what we see. Similarly, we need not fear that a study of the spiritual means through which the prophet received his revelation will impair our belief in its credibility and authority. The criterion of the truth of a revelation lies not in the particular circumstances with which its original communication was accompanied, but in the sustained appeal which it makes to the heart and reason and conscience of men, in the power which it possesses to answer the obstinate questionings of the soul and to inspire the peace which passes all understanding. It is because the messages transmitted to the world through the prophets have been submitted to this test and have been approved in the result that we confess them to be of a divine origin.

## CHAPTER II

### DIVINATION IN EARLY HEBREW RELIGION

IN order to discover the ultimate antecedents of prophecy we must be prepared to go a long way back in the religious history of the world. In accordance with what has been said already as to the function of prophecy in natural religion, it may be plausibly contended that since the first appearance of mankind upon the earth there has never been a time when prophecy or something analogous to it has not been doing its beneficent work. In the wider sense of the word prophecy is coeval with religion, perhaps coeval with man. For indeed the question whether primitive man had or had not a religion is primarily a matter of definition. If nothing may be called a religion except some wide synthesis of ideas as to God and the world, then it is evident that undeveloped man by reason of his incapacity for sustained and abstract thought cannot be credited with the possession of any such system of belief. On the other hand, the researches of the anthropologists have shown that the savage of to-day, who in these respects is probably not far removed from the position of primitive man, can at all events distinguish between the natural and the supernatural. Obviously in those earliest days the conception of either term in this relation of contrast must have been far other than our own. To primitive man nature was not the system of regular sequences, the stream of events ever flowing in a channel determined by law,

the vast machine of matter and force, unresting, irresistible, relentless, which presents itself to the imagination of the man of science. As little did his conception of the supernatural tally with that which we derive from our religious teachers. It was not the world of absolute and self-existent being, of eternal verities, of infinite beauty and perfect goodness. Yet incapable as primitive man may have been of entertaining conceptions such as these, he seems to have distinguished sharply enough between the natural, which coming within his ken was subject in a measure to his control, and that other supernatural world of which the powers were veiled, mysterious, overwhelming. Though he did not draw the line between the two where we place it, he drew it nevertheless and drew it clearly. As Professor Jevons<sup>1</sup> has pointed out, he may have fancied himself capable of bringing the rain, of directing the tempest, and controlling the motions of the sun, yet it was because he conceived these things to be naturally within the compass of human powers, not because he claimed supernatural skill. Confronted (for so it seemed to him) with incalculable caprice in both spheres, he still felt himself able to contend on more or less equal terms with the world of nature, whereas over against that other mysterious supernatural world he was forced to admit not only his ignorance, but his utter helplessness. Highly conjectural as any attempt to construct a theory of the origin of religion must always remain, yet there is much to be said for the view that in this sense of the mystery of the supernatural lay its seed-germ. This hypothesis it is possible to accept while leaving entirely open the many vexed questions to which as yet no answer can be given with

<sup>1</sup> *Introd. to Hist. of Religion*, p. 24.

any measure of probability. As to the particular causes which first occasioned this thrill in the presence of a great mystery we are in no position to dogmatize. Was it the overwhelming operations of nature, the storm and tempest, the sunrise and the starry heavens, or was it the perplexing experience of dreams? Was the feeling aroused in primitive man nothing but an abject terror of the powers which could thwart his plans and slay himself, or was it even from the first a nobler sentiment in which awe mingled with fear? These are questions of absorbing interest, but they do not immediately concern us. In whatever way they are answered it will still remain true that there is no trace in human history of any period when man did not feel himself to be standing in the presence of the unknown, surrounded by the supernatural.

But, according to the mind of primitive man, this supernatural world with all its mystery was not shut off by an insuperable barrier. It was not 'the unknowable'. On the contrary, as far back as we can go, we find indications that men believed some of themselves to be possessed of exceptional powers and privileges, enabling them to cross the threshold of this house of mystery, to mingle with the denizens of the other world, and thereby themselves to obtain the control of supernatural forces. Out of this belief sprang both religion and magic. We need refer only in passing to the outstanding controversy as to the relation which existed between these antagonistic attitudes towards the supernatural. A school of anthropologists, as is well known, maintain the chronological priority of magic to religion. They hold that man began by imagining himself or some favoured members of his tribe to be able to achieve otherwise impossible ends



by means of charms and spells and secret rites. Religion they suppose to have arisen when man began to regard such attempts as infringements of the divine prerogative. In opposition to magic he sought to accomplish the same end by means of enlisting the goodwill of the gods on his behalf through prayer and sacrifice. This derivation of religion from magic has in its favour the appearance of following the natural order in presenting the higher system as evolved from the lower. On the other hand, it raises difficulties which have never been satisfactorily explained. Once given the belief in magic as a point of departure it may be easy to suggest causes accounting for its gradual transformation into religion. But whence came that original belief, which is the necessary starting point of the theory? No answer is forthcoming. As a matter of fact, it is no whit more legitimate nor any easier to assume the existence of a *primaeval* belief in magic than to take for granted the dim feeling of awe which was the beginning of religion. To assume the evolution of religion out of magic is as much an hypothesis, and in the opinion of many competent judges, a less probable hypothesis, than to account for magic as the degradation of religion. For our purpose the point to be insisted upon is not the priority of one to the other, but the cardinal fact that very early in their respective careers religion and magic were definitely opposed to one another as respectively licit and illicit modes of converse with the supernatural powers. The whole course of religion over an immense period of time was governed by the hostility between the two. The one worked in the light, the other in the darkness; the one publicly claimed recognition and allegiance from the community, the other extended its influence by secret appeals to

the fears and superstitions of individuals. Doubtless there have been countries where for a period the practice of magic has been so universally condoned in fact, if not approved in theory, as to gain a complete predominance over religion. Yet even in such circumstances the stigma of secrecy has clung to the black art. Its professors have been in the position of pretenders who for the time being have succeeded in placing themselves upon the throne of authority, but are liable at any moment to be overthrown by a counter-revolution in favour of the legitimate claimants.

The profound antagonism between religion and magic was largely due to the fact that they were rivals in their offer to supply man with something which he eagerly desired, viz. supernatural knowledge ensuring him success in his schemes, victory in battle, or revenge upon his enemies. Alternative methods were open to the man who sought to avail himself of this superhuman assistance. He could either go openly to the priest of the tribe, avowing his intention and indeed gaining credit for his religious action, or furtively and in secret he might visit the magician. To obtain information at the sanctuary by means of the casting of the sacred lot, or by any one of the infinitely various modes of augury would be an entirely legitimate proceeding, whereas to have recourse to the witch or the necromancer, though possibly in the opinion of the inquirer a more effective measure, would not be one for which he would expect to receive the approbation of his fellows.

Approval of divination and condemnation of magic was the usual verdict of public opinion in the heathen world. In the sharpest possible contrast with this attitude we find divination and magic bracketed together

in one common condemnation by the Hebrew writer—Deut. xviii. 10, 11: ‘There shall not be found among you any one . . . that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.’ The whole context of the passage is of prime importance on account of the light which it throws on the development of the Hebrew religion. That it indicates a great advance in religious conceptions is evident. The prohibition of divination is meant to prepare the way for the commendation of prophecy, and the whole mind of the writer is profoundly influenced by his sense of the contrast between the respective functions of diviner and prophet. It was essential to the religious life of the nation that the latter should take the place of the former. Like his predecessor he will be a vehicle of supernatural knowledge, but in a different and far higher way. The verses that follow enable us to form a picture of what the writer conceived the true prophet to be, and of the character of the divine communications which he was to transmit to his people. Very significantly the principal characteristic is indicated by a phrase put into the mouth of Moses, ‘a prophet like unto me.’ How much that meant we cannot properly appreciate until we reflect on the nobility and the dignity of the figure of Moses as depicted in the Book of Deuteronomy. The great lawgiver is more than the founder of a nation and the promulgator of a code ; he is the exponent of the eternal principles of righteousness and the revealer of the divine nature. No prophet could be described as ‘like him’ who did not in his degree deal with the same high themes and expound them with a like authority. Whereas the diviner had not risen beyond the part of a supernatural adviser, ready to exercise

his powers in the interest of a consultant, the prophet is to stand in an altogether different relation to the people. He comes forward not primarily in answer to their inquiries, but spontaneously, impelled by the conviction that God has put words into his mouth, and conscious that he is charged with a message which he must needs deliver. Words so spoken are equivalent to a divine command, imposing an obligation which cannot be evaded or neglected. Hence the prophet moved on a different plane from the diviner, who aspired only to supply in individual cases the resource of supernatural knowledge. The religion of which the authorized spokesman has become such a prophet as is here described has advanced far along the road of ethical and spiritual development. To this higher level the religion of Israel had been raised when this passage was written. Whatever may have been the religious standpoint of the multitude, the nobler minds, at all events, had formed a worthy conception of what a divine messenger and a divine communication should be.

This point of development was not reached until after many previous stages had been traversed. With the help of the narratives and allusions in the historical books of the Old Testament we are able in some measure to trace the line of advance. The evidence is not abundant in quantity, but it is sufficient to show that the distinction between divination and prophecy, profoundly important as we have seen it to be, was not original in the religion of Israel. In the early days of the national history divination was a popular and approved practice. Prophecy in the later sense of the word had not yet come upon the scene.

The studies of the last half century have sufficiently established the fact that between the religion of Israel

and that of the neighbouring tribes there was the closest external resemblance. It is an obvious corollary that the rites and ceremonies of the Israelites will often become intelligible only when illustrated by a comparison with those of the kindred nations. The common religion of the Semites was the foundation on which the Spirit of God built up the religion of Israel. It is antecedently probable that in this matter of divination and magic, so characteristic of early religions, the points of resemblance should be particularly close and striking. The expectation is fully borne out on examination. The Hebrew language bears its witness to the fact that the Hebrews and their heathen kinsfolk derived their superstitious practices from a common ancestral tradition. The very words used in these verses to describe the forbidden arts reappear in the cognate Semitic languages with similar meanings attached to them.<sup>1</sup>

There is evidence to show that from the time when the Israelites established themselves in Palestine they were accustomed to practice divination, and there is every reason to think that the habit was far more ancient, having been inherited by them from pre-Mosaic times. Positive evidence on the point is, however, lacking. The language of the Pentateuch with regard to the actions of the Patriarchs cannot safely be cited, since it reflects more probably the feelings of the time when the narratives were committed to writing than those of the primitive society which it describes. It is, therefore, in the surviving historical books that we must look for our earliest information upon the point in question. In the book of Judges what evidence there is

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 223-6; W. R. Smith, *Journal of Philology*, xiii. 273 ff.; xiv. 113 ff.



is somewhat indirect, but it points definitely in this direction. Indications are often preserved in the names of places. Thus the reference to the oak of the diviners (מְעִינִים), Judges ix. 37, witnesses to the prevalence of a particular kind of divination by means of a sacred tree. The Danites on their way to search for new territory asked Micah's Levite to divine for them (Judges xviii. 5). When the Israelites desired to inflict punishment on the Benjamites they appealed more than once for direction by means of the oracle (xx. 18, 27). It is highly probable that the whole account of this religious war between Benjamin and the rest of Israel is largely the work of a late hand. The numbers of the forces engaged are vastly exaggerated, and the reversals of fortune on consecutive days are prodigious in their suddenness and completeness. But the particular incident of recourse to the oracle in war is entirely in keeping with primitive practice. The late redactor to whom the insertion of these verses is most probably due had in this matter a more accurate conception of the probabilities of the case than a modern commentator who writes as follows: 'This way of making war in which the operations are immediately directed by Jahweh through his oracle, and the fighting interspersed with religious exercises, is altogether different from the wars of the Judges in the earlier part of the book. It is not history, it is not legend, but the theocratic idea of a scribe who had never handled a more dangerous weapon than the imaginative pen.'<sup>1</sup> This criticism is less judicious than it is vigorously expressed. That the furnishing of advice in the critical emergencies of war was one of the chief functions of the oracle can be shown by the evidence of parallel instances in

<sup>1</sup> Moore, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, ad loc.

biblical history which will come under our notice when we turn to the book of Samuel. The practice was indeed so general as to have left traces of itself in many parts of the world and among many races. It will be sufficient to quote a few examples from different sources. The primitive Arabs are said always to have consulted the oracle before commencing a campaign, precisely as the Hebrews are here represented as doing.<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel pictures Nebuchadnezzar as determining by divination in the presence of the idol whether he shall advance against Rabbah or Jerusalem (Ezek. xxi. 21). Still later in the history of the world a cultured Athenian general allowed his military operations to be entirely altered in deference to unpropitious omens (*Thuc.* vii. 50). Such evidence could, if necessary, be multiplied indefinitely. The imagination of the pious scribe who penned the account of the war between Benjamin and the tribes was, at any rate in this particular, true to fact.

In the same book of Judges we find references to the Ephod and to the Teraphim. The explanation of these terms is a very obscure question in which certainty is unattainable. • But there seems reason to suppose that both the words signify images used in connexion with divination. The ephod in Judges viii. 27, xvii, xviii, cannot possibly be the highly ornamental priestly garment described at length in Exod. xxviii, nor the linen ephod as worn by the young Samuel in his ministrations (1 Sam. ii. 18). That it was an image of some sort would seem to follow from the expression in Judges viii. 27, 'he set it up,' and in Judges xvii. 4, 5, where the graven and molten image apparently correspond with the ephod and teraphim. The fact that the sword of Goliath was kept behind

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Whitehouse, in Hastings's *Bible Dictionary*, iv. 198.

the ephod suggests that the latter was an image standing in front of a wall.<sup>1</sup> The ephod with which Abiathar comes to David is evidently the instrument of divination (1 Sam. xxiii. 9). The narrative of David's escape through the ruse of Michal in putting the teraphim in his bed indicates that it also was an image in human shape, and easily mistaken for the body of a sleeper. Allusions in later books confirm the view that there was a close connexion between the teraphim and divination (Ezek. xxi. 21; Zech. x. 2).

When we turn to the books of Samuel a convenient point of departure for our investigation is afforded by those texts in which there is a reference to 'inquiring of the Lord' (1 Sam. x. 22; xxii. 10, 13, 15; xxiii. 2, 4; xxviii. 6; xxx. 8; 2 Sam. ii. 1; v. 19, 23). In every one of these passages the object of the inquiry is to obtain definite direction from the oracle. An alternative or a succession of alternatives is proposed (cf. 1 Sam. xxiii. 10 ff.), to which, by some means not precisely described, an answer is forthcoming either affirmative or negative. Upon the strength of the information thus sought and obtained action is taken and the danger successfully avoided (v. 13).

Even more interesting and important is the significant use of the expression 'seek God'. So familiar has the phrase become, and so intimately associated with the rich spiritual connotation which it bears in Deuteronomy, the Prophets, and the Psalms, that our attention cannot but be aroused when we find it used in another context and with a far lower significance. Yet that it had originally a different meaning is plain beyond question. 'Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to seek God he spake thus, Come and let us go to the seer'

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Nowack's *Hebräische Archäologie*, ii. 21.

(1 Sam. ix. 9).<sup>1</sup> Both in the Authorized Version and the Revised Version the word has been rendered 'inquire of' without marginal note. Thus a point of real importance is obscured. Once upon a time the phrase 'to seek God' meant to have recourse to the oracle in order to obtain advice in some practical difficulty. The conception of spiritual effort, of the striving of the soul towards God, had not yet been imported into the words. They belong to an altogether lower level of religious thought, when the presence of God was conceived as connected in some mysterious way with the holy place and with the ministrations of the seer. The remainder of the narrative describing the visit of Saul to Samuel is no less instructive in the light which it throws upon the position of the diviner in early Israel. It is plainly excellent evidence derived from some nearly contemporaneous source; and it shows how the seer might be consulted on matters entirely private and secular, and how he was entitled to receive a fee from the inquirer.

There seems to be little doubt that the references to Urim and Thummim allude to the practice of obtaining a reply from the oracle by the means of casting lots with sacred stones. A reconstructed text of 1 Sam. xiv. 41, based upon the reading of the LXX, points in this direction. 'Why hast thou not answered thy servant this day? If this iniquity be in me or in my son Jonathan, O Lord God of Israel give Urim, but if it be in thy people Israel give Thummim.'<sup>2</sup> Successive castings

<sup>1</sup> לִירֹשׁ אֱלֹהִים. The higher meaning subsequently attached to the phrase did not exclude the lower. Cf. 1 Kings xxii. 8; Jer. xxi. 2; Ezek. xx. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel*, ad loc.

of the sacred lot bring home the guilt to the King's son; and the explanation of the withdrawal of the divine help is forthcoming. It is clear from this and similar passages that the assistance of the oracle was regarded by the worshipper as his due from the God whom he worshipped. And hence it was that Saul, having forfeited the divine aid, conceived himself to be constrained to adopt illicit means for obtaining this indispensable support. If he had not felt himself helpless without this supernatural advice he would never have been guilty of the inconsistency of betaking himself to the witch of Endor after the vigorous measures which he had himself taken in the past against witchcraft.

The evidence which we have been considering goes to show that up to the time of Samuel, at least, divination was a common practice among the Hebrews, so common indeed as to be an integral part of their religion. In the seer, such as we have seen him to be, the communicator not of spiritual instruction but of pressingly needed information, often secular in character, we might have failed to discover the spiritual progenitor of the great religious teachers of succeeding centuries, had not Scripture itself called our attention to the fact. 'He that is now called a prophet was beforetime called a seer' (1 Sam. ix. 9). Presently we shall endeavour to trace the course of the process of transition by which the seer was transformed into the prophet, and with this purpose in mind will return to the consideration of the life of Samuel. For in him who was pre-eminently both seer and prophet we may expect to observe the working of the natural and spiritual forces which effected the transformation. It was not, of course, immediate and complete. Long afterwards certain



characteristics of the diviner are still recognizable in the prophet. Before, however, proceeding to deal with the development of prophecy, it will be well at this point to attempt an answer to some further questions bearing on the psychology of divination. Any conclusions that it may be possible to reach with regard to the psychology of the seer will provide a definite basis for the further pursuit of the corresponding inquiry into the nature of prophecy.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DIVINATION

ALTHOUGH the Biblical evidence is sufficient to warrant the assertion that divination was commonly practised among the Hebrews, yet is it necessarily limited in variety and quantity. In the Bible alone we could hardly expect to find materials for the construction of a theory of divination. The number of facts mentioned is too small, the basis of induction too restricted. Can we legitimately enlarge our field of observation by giving admission to evidence derived from the records of heathen divination? The answer to this question will obviously depend upon the extent and the validity of the analogy which we find to exist between the inspired and the uninspired diviner. Should the points of similarity be confined to the mere external circumstances, the superficiality of the analogy would render it devoid of any real significance. If, on the other hand, the likeness between the two can be shown to be close and striking, embracing not only the outward details but some of the deeper forces at work, then conclusions based upon the facts of heathen divination may properly serve as a guide to the interpretation of similar phenomena among the Hebrews. Doubtless it will be necessary at the same time to take equally careful note of the points of difference, which will be found no less remarkable than the points of likeness. However similar Jewish and heathen divination may have been in their origins and in the earlier stages of

their development, they certainly issued in very different results. It will therefore be necessary to seek for an explanation, not only of their common features, but also of that difference of spirit, which manifested itself with an ever-increasing clearness.

The comparison and contrast which we desire to institute between Jewish and ethnic divination might be widely illustrated from the data collected for the purposes of comparative religion. It will not, however, be necessary for us to deal with the question at length. Even if we confine our attention almost exclusively to the familiar field of classical literature, we shall there find a considerable quantity of evidence bearing on the subject in hand. Rome, indeed, afforded no very favourable soil for any plant of religious growth. The genius of the people had a different bent. And though, like all other nations of antiquity of which we have knowledge, they inherited and continued to practice an elaborate system of divination, yet early in their history oracles and omens became to them matters of comparatively small interest. In the treatise of Cicero, *De Divinatione*, we are provided with the means of forming some conception of the ideas current among men of education about this matter at the close of the republican period. If any belief at all was still retained, it was presumably of the kind ascribed in the Dialogue to Quintus, a traditional acceptance of the supposed facts of divination, without any attempt to give a reason for them, or to ascertain why certain signs should be supposed arbitrarily to predict good or bad fortune.<sup>1</sup> Belief having so far decayed was bound before long either to disappear entirely or to sink into the crudest

<sup>1</sup> 'Hoc sum contentus quod etiam si quomodo quidque fiat ignorem, quid fiat intelligo' (i. 9).

superstition. Little light is therefore likely to be thrown upon the problem of divination by a literature which did not begin to flow in any abundance until after this point of scepticism had been already reached.

In Greek literature, on the other hand, it is possible to trace the development of opinion with regard to divination through many stages, beginning with an uncritical credulity and ending with philosophic detachment. We are enabled to follow the process from first to last ; and the history is the more instructive, because, allowing for the many obvious differences of national character and temperament, the prevalence and influence of divination in Greece present some marked resemblances with what we have seen to be the case in Israel. In both countries there was the same general attitude of expectancy, the same unquestioning belief in the possibility of ascertaining facts by superhuman means, the same ready recourse to the oracle in every kind of emergency, and even to some extent the use of identical methods.<sup>1</sup> Recent archaeological discovery has provided a quantity of new information with regard both to Semitic and to Greek magic, all tending to illustrate the essential similarity of the two systems. We, however, are concerned not with the subsequent morbid developments, but with that earlier simpler belief in the accessibility of supernatural knowledge to which no stigma attached. A bare enumeration of a few facts, illustrated by references to familiar classical writers, will be sufficiently significant. In Greece and in Israel alike men turn to the oracle in time of war,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Köhler, *Der Prophetismus der Hebräer und die Mantik der Griechen* ; Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la Divination dans l'Antiquité*, 4 vols.

<sup>2</sup> Herod. i. 53.

on occasions of sickness,<sup>1</sup> for the solution of ritual questions.<sup>2</sup> Divination by lot, which we have seen to be familiar to the Hebrews, was not unknown among the Greeks, though the references to it are not numerous. It is mentioned as in use at Delphi.<sup>3</sup>

Dreams are accepted as a special mode of divine communication. In the Old Testament examples are frequent and familiar. The book of Genesis alone provides several instances—the dreams of Jacob, of Joseph, of Pharaoh. Similarly in Homer dreams come with a message from heaven.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes they explain themselves; at other times they require an interpreter. Eurydamas, like Joseph, or like the friend to whom the Midianite related his dream (Judges vii. 14), has this faculty of interpretation (*Il.* v. 149). Dreams that come to sleepers who pass the night within the precincts of the oracle have a peculiar claim to be regarded as significant. Thus Solomon receives his revelation with regard to the future of his reign at Gibeon, where was the ‘great high place’. At various places in Greece there were temples to which people resorted with the special intention of there passing the night and obtaining some supernatural communication by means of a dream. Such was the temple of Amphiaraus at Oropus. The Lacedaemonian leaders used to sleep at the temple of Pasiphae with similar expectations.<sup>5</sup>

In the Old Testament we come across references to various other modes of divination for which parallels may be cited from Greek antiquity, such as divination

<sup>1</sup> Herod. i. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Legg.* bk. vi, p. 759. Cf. Zech. vii. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la Divination*, i. 194. κληρομαντεία, ψηφομαντεία.

<sup>4</sup> Καὶ γάρ τ' ὄναρ ἐκ Διὸς ἐστίν, *Il.* i. 63.

<sup>5</sup> Cicero, *De Divin.* i. 43.



by means of rods or arrows (Hos. iv. 12),<sup>1</sup> by means of water or wine in the bowl (Gen. xlv. 5),<sup>2</sup> by means of reference to the spirits of the dead (Lev. xix. 31; Isa. viii. 19).<sup>3</sup> But, interesting as the comparison might be, we will not pursue it further. For there is no proof that such methods were used by those diviners whom we believe to have been the spiritual progenitors of the prophets. On the contrary, they are only mentioned in the Old Testament with severe condemnation, and are declared to be incompatible with fidelity to the national religion. There is thus a sharp contrast between them and the sacred lot and dream, which, as we have seen, are recognized with approval in early times.

Everywhere the most important and most popular method of divination has been the consultation of the specially gifted seer, who claims to be the mouthpiece of his God. His convulsed condition, his loss of normal consciousness, the complete suspension for the time being of the ordinary mental functions, were the salient features which were accepted among the Hebrews no less than among the Greeks as the visible proofs of inspiration. The famous description in the *Aeneid* paints the distressed condition of the seer at the moment of the supposed divine afflatus :

non voltus, non color unus,  
Non comptae mansere comae ; sed pectus anhelum,  
Et rabie fera corda tument ; maiorque videri,  
Nec mortale sonans, adflata est numine quando  
Iam propiore dei. *Aen.* vi. 47 ff.

The prophets whom Saul met, and to whose company he joined himself, under the influence of their infectious

<sup>1</sup> ραβδομαντεία.

<sup>2</sup> λεκανομαντεία, ὑδρομαντεία.

<sup>3</sup> νεκρομαντεία

enthusiasm exhibited traits of abnormal excitement not altogether unlike those which Virgil attributes to the priestess (1 Sam. xix. 24). That men so affected exhibited symptoms closely resembling those of insanity is evident from both languages. In Hebrew the same word is used to describe both prophecy and frenzy (cf. 1 Sam. xviii. 10)<sup>1</sup>; and the prophet who comes to Jehu is referred to as this mad fellow (2 Kings ix. 11). Plato, with an intention half serious, half ironical, comments at some length in the *Phaedrus* on a supposed connexion between prophecy and madness.<sup>2</sup>

But supposing it to be granted that the same benefits were expected from divination in Greece as in Israel, and also that externally the diviners of both nations must have closely resembled one another, the question still remains to be asked, whether the resemblance goes deeper than externals. Did ethnic divination actually succeed in doing in some measure for the Greeks what we believe inspired divination to have accomplished for the Hebrews? Or was the whole system one of fraud from top to bottom? Rationalism of course refuses all credence in either case. The mere notion of communication through the seer of information unattainable by ordinary means is scouted as an impossibility not worthy of discussion. All such tales should be dismissed at once as mere idle fables, whether they appear in the Bible or in Herodotus. To the credulous, on the other hand, the element of the marvellous has a profound attraction. They have been as prompt in their acceptance of these narratives as the rationalists have been in their rejection. It is easy to see that sweeping views such as these are dictated by opposite prejudices. And yet both these extreme positions are

<sup>1</sup> הַנָּבִיא.

<sup>2</sup> μαντική and μανική, *Phaedrus*, p. 244.

more easily defensible on logical grounds than the indiscriminating acceptance of all the Biblical accounts of divination, combined with the equally indiscriminating rejection of all narratives of the kind in secular literature. It is as necessary to be on our guard against an undue scepticism in these matters as against an excessive credulity. And, indeed, unless one is prepared to do violence to the evidence and to decide the question on entirely *a priori* grounds, it is impossible to maintain that heathen divination was nothing but an elaborate system of astute trickery. When every possible allowance has been made for the extreme credulity of the ancient world, and for the prodigious influence of superstition, there yet remains a body of testimony which it would be sheer prejudice to ignore. Obviously the evidence for particular cases will not come up to the standard required by the Society for Psychical Research; but we must give its due weight to the deliberate conclusions of some of the keenest minds of the ancient world—conclusions, be it remembered, maintained in the face of adverse criticism. Euripides may dismiss the whole hypothesis of divination with a characteristic epigram,<sup>1</sup> but the philosophers, who had no lack of opportunity of testing the evidence and detecting fraud, were by no means unanimous in their rejection of the diviner's claims. Moreover, they reached their conclusion in spite of a critical attitude towards popular religion. Naturally Epicurus and Xenophanes adopted a position of complete scepticism, and the Peripatetics maintained a reasonable contempt for omens. But not only was a mystic like Pythagoras a believer in divination, but even Aristotle is reported to have credited the human soul with a certain capacity

<sup>1</sup> μάντις ἄριστος ὅστις εἰκάζει καλῶς. Fr. inc. cxxviii.

for foreknowing and foretelling the future. 'The soul,' says Aristotle, 'divines and predicts the future.'<sup>1</sup> The most famous oracle in Greece certainly succeeded in maintaining its reputation through the course of centuries. With reference to Delphi, it is said in the *De Divinatione* of Cicero: 'Let it be granted, as indeed cannot be denied without doing violence to all history, that for many centuries that oracle has been found veracious (Cicero, *De Divinat.* i. 19). The words are doubtless spoken in character by the representative of belief in divination, and must not, of course, be taken as presenting the unqualified opinion of the author. But Cicero would scarcely have put so definite a statement into the mouth of one of his characters if he had not felt that there was a considerable foundation in fact for the assertion. Strabo calls the Delphic oracle the most trustworthy of all. Plutarch declares that the Pythia had never so far been convicted of error.<sup>2</sup> Thucydides, the last man in the world to be open to the reproach of superstition, nevertheless believes the Pythian oracle with reference to the Pelasgic shrine under the Acropolis to have been fulfilled (ii. 17). It is more than possible that the various witnesses to which reference has been made err on the side of exaggeration. In spite of Plutarch's testimony, we may be sure that there was no lack of unfulfilled oracles. But some measure of genuine success there must surely have been. So great and so stable a reputation can neither have arisen on the strength of a few lucky coincidences, nor have maintained itself on no better support than the special astuteness of the presiding authorities at Delphi. To what cause, then, are we to assign this success in

<sup>1</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Advers. Mathematic.* ix. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Nägelsbach, *Nachhomerische Theologie*, p. 183.

detecting secrets and predicting the future? Partial and uncertain in its action the power may very well have been, and yet at the same time in some measure genuine. At any rate, so it seemed to the early Christians, who had no hesitation whatever as to the question of its origin. The readiness with which they acknowledge the possession by the oracle of supernatural powers is proportionate to the emphatic confidence with which they declare those powers to be demoniac in character. Tertullian has no doubts about the matter. 'What else can we say about the remaining oracles, but that the nature of the spirits was demoniac, who even then took up their abode in men.'<sup>1</sup> Origen expresses the same opinion,<sup>2</sup> and so also does S. Chrysostom.<sup>3</sup> Here was a theory which, to give it its due, appeared to square with the facts of the case as they were then believed to be. The explanation which it provided was to the Christians both plausible and acceptable, accounting as it did for the remarkable phenomena of the oracle, and at the same time affirming an absolute distinction and opposition between Christian and heathen inspiration. The latter, the existence of which was not disputed, was condemned as positively evil in character, and declared to be evidently due to the baneful influence of the devil himself. The position could not be more succinctly stated than in the sentence with which Suidas begins his article on Prophecy, 'Prophecy: the one kind is spiritual, the other diabolical.'

There is nothing surprising in the circumstance that the Christians in the throes of their struggle against the organized forces of heathenism should have

<sup>1</sup> *De Anima*, c. xlv.

<sup>2</sup> *con. Celsum*, vii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Hom. in I Corinth.* xx.



condemned the whole practice of divination root and branch. They were unquestionably right in the main ; and yet it is possible to admit that the tension of the conflict may have in some measure influenced their judgement. Allowance must also be made for the effects of that process of deterioration amongst the Greek diviners which had commenced centuries back and had reached an advanced stage before the beginning of the Christian era. The seer of the heroic age was by no means so contemptible a figure as were the professional diviners of later times. According to the witness of Homer he wielded an immense influence which, sometimes at all events, was exerted in defence of the oppressed against the abuse of arbitrary power.<sup>1</sup> Teiresias faces the ruler of his city with courage, and in virtue of his office claims the right to advise obedience to the common dictates of humanity.<sup>2</sup> But these are, after all, only isolated instances, and literary, not historical. They represent an author's conception of what a seer might be rather than supply us with evidence as to what he actually was. Stronger testimony is required if we are to admit that divination was of any real value in Greek religion. In this matter the most conspicuous example is specially significant. Was there at Delphi the manifestation of some power transcending the ordinary human limits ; and did this power throughout a considerable period of time exercise an influence for good in the national life ? What evidence there is seems to suggest an answer in the affirmative. Celsus drew attention to the fact that Delphi had both stimulated and directed Greek colonization.<sup>3</sup> According to some legends, both the

<sup>1</sup> *Iliad*, i. 68 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Sophocles, *Antig.* 992.

<sup>3</sup> Origen, *contr. Cels.* vii. 3.

great legislators Lycurgus and Solon had been supported by its influence. On occasions it intervened to restrain the barbarities of war, as when at the close of the long-drawn struggle of the Peloponnesian War it forbade Sparta to destroy Athens. It would be a great mistake to suppose that this oracle—the chief exponent of divination in Greece—was exclusively or even principally concerned with the task of foretelling the future or revealing mysterious secrets. The larger part of its activity was devoted to the determination of the right course to pursue in cases of difficulty, which sometimes involved genuine moral problems, though perhaps more often concerned mere matters of ritual. Delphi was really, if only partly, an institution for the delivery of moral decisions. In order to estimate rightly the significance of the oracle it should be remembered that it was accounted as much a mouthpiece of the goddess Themis as of Apollo.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, when we give due weight to the beneficial influences of the Delphic oracle, and compare its activity with what was effected in Israel by means of divination with reference to the migration of tribes (Judges i. 1; xviii. 5), the denunciation of blood-guiltiness (2 Sam. xxi. 1), the establishment of the kingdom (1 Sam. x), we can hardly resist the conclusion that the resemblance between Jewish and ethnic divination is something more than superficial. Amongst the heathen also there must have been at work a power not entirely false, though from the first clogged and hampered by those evil elements which at length gained the complete mastery, and brought the whole system to corruption and ruin. No hypothesis

<sup>1</sup> Pindar, *Pyth.* xi. 9.

will satisfactorily fit the facts, unless it will in some measure account for the 'wonders' which occurred at the oracle, and at the same time recognize the mixed character of the oracle's influence for good and ill. The theory of the action of an evil spirit, so generally accepted among the early Christians, laboured under the defect of failing to account for this admixture of better elements. It was the natural product of a time when the oracles had ceased to concern themselves with matters of any real worth and moment, and were employed in answering private and trivial questions. What is wanted is a theory which, without losing sight of the accumulation of fraud and trickery with which the whole system was overloaded, will nevertheless allow for some substratum of truth in the tales which gathered round the oracle, and will not invoke diabolic agency for that purpose.

It is interesting to notice that the divination of the oracle has not been without some parallels in modern times. Not many generations have passed since it was a common belief that supernatural powers similar to those of the ancient diviner might be purchased by means of a bargain with the Evil One. Compacts with the Devil are heard of no longer. It is a generally accepted conclusion that many if not all of the phenomena of witchcraft are to be explained as due to the action of unusual, but not supernatural, psychic powers. Nor are we dependent only on the study of antiquated records in the investigation of these matters. Present day evidence is forthcoming and is demanding a more ample recognition than has been hitherto accorded to it. What the ancient diviner did it is reasonable to suppose that he succeeded in doing because he was possessed of those psychic capacities

which have been the subject matter of much recent psychological study. Obscure as the subject still is, and is indeed likely to continue for many years to come, the establishment of some few principles has been the reward of sedulous and systematic work in this field. Entirely apart from the exceedingly questionable hypothesis of so-called 'spiritualism', what seems to have been proved is this: There is a range of faculty far surpassing in acuteness of perception, in tenacity of memory, in rapidity of action, and in facility of production those ordinary powers which we are accustomed to exert in everyday life. These capacities can be watched and studied at times when there is no suggestion of any supernatural intervention. Many observations and experiments are on record<sup>1</sup> in the face of which it is impossible to deny to man some power of telaesthesia and telepathy. It would seem as though a candid examination of the available evidence could hardly fail to produce at the least this minimum of assent. Even so trenchant a critic as Mr. Podmore, whose treatise on *Modern Spiritualism* is severe enough to satisfy the most exacting sceptic, and who resolutely repudiates any mystical or supernatural explanation, makes the following acknowledgement: 'Side by side with the now admitted manifestations of automatic activity . . . there have been found from very early times . . . facts which seem to indicate some mode of perception or some mode of communication between mind and mind as yet unrecognized' (*Modern Spiritualism*, p. xvii).

It is a reasonable conjecture that the diviner was endowed with psychic powers of more than ordinary

<sup>1</sup> Cf. especially the Appendices in F. W. H. Myers's *Human Personality*.

strength, and in their exercise displayed the phenomena of automatism. If so, it would naturally follow that he would regard himself, and be regarded by others, as supernaturally inspired. His claim to inspiration would be honest in intention, however exaggerated and mistaken. It is one of the peculiarities of these powers that they are in their action as mysterious to their possessors as to the onlookers. They are also curiously intermittent in operation and impatient of control. Without himself being able to give any account of the process by which the result is obtained, the thought-reader becomes aware of what is passing in the mind of his companion, the seer perceives some incident occurring at a distant spot. So it was in the old days. It may have been some guilty secret which was thus brought to light through the agency of the diviner ; it may have been some event at a distance of which he became mysteriously informed, and news of which he was able to transmit to his fellows. In the eyes of those who consulted the oracle anything of the kind would of course pass for a miracle, and we can well imagine how even a few such cases might establish a reputation that many subsequent failures would not avail to shake.

It is some confirmation of this conjecture that in Greece, at all events, the delivery of the oracle seems to have been made under the conditions of the induced trance. It appears that the Pythia uttered her pronouncements without being conscious of the meaning of her own words. 'Prophecy,' writes Plato, 'is a madness, and the prophetess at Delphi and the priestess at Dodona have conferred great benefits on Hellas, when out of their senses.'<sup>1</sup> The extraordinary facility and fluency of their improvisations, together

<sup>1</sup> *Phaedrus*, p. 244.



with their subsequent complete loss of memory of all that had passed their lips, may well have seemed to their hearers a proof of the presence of some super-human power, a clear evidence of inspiration. Yet, as is now well known, these very phenomena are the usual accompaniments of a certain kind of trance. The entranced person will exhibit the most surprising readiness in the composition of either verse or prose, speaking with an ease and fluency of which in his normal condition he is altogether incapable. At length, on emerging from the trance, he will retain no memory whatever of what he has said and done. In these matters the guardians of the shrine were in all probability as ignorant of the true *modus operandi* as were the worshippers, and as ready as their consultants to attribute the supposed marvel to the direct influence of the god. It must needs be confessed that our own ignorance of the forces which produce these mysterious results is almost equally great. Perhaps the only advantage which we have gained is the recognition of the facts as natural phenomena, and our consequent expectation of future discoveries about them. It is no longer necessary either to deny altogether the possibility of strange manifestations at Delphi, or to invoke the agency of an evil spirit in order to explain them.

By means of his mysterious and supposed supernatural endowments the diviner acquired an almost unlimited influence, which he might use well or ill, in the interest of his fellow men, or to his own selfish advantage. Sometimes he chose the nobler part, and thus was the means of conferring (as Plato affirms) no small benefits upon his country both in public and private life. But it was too often entirely otherwise. For the

most part the possession of these marvellous capacities and the dominant influence thence derived proved too strong a temptation for the virtue of the diviner to resist. He prostituted his gifts in various ways, making either wealth or power his object of ambition. That the diviners were, as a rule, a covetous and grasping class was a common and probably well-merited reproach.<sup>1</sup> Even Delphi was not on all occasions above suspicion of bribery.<sup>2</sup> The effects which followed inevitably from this misapplication of high gifts to low ends were deplorable ; and the process of degeneration, having once begun, continued without check or stay. The result was that seers, fortune-tellers, astrologers, and the whole kindred tribe of parasites on society became the objects of a richly deserved contemptuous condemnation.

Besides the natural weakness of human nature and its proneness to the temptations involved in the possession of irresponsible power, there was another and even more potent cause at work, which will serve to account for the lamentable failure of the Greek seer to become the guide and inspirer of the national religion. It was one of the many noxious consequences which issued from the confused medley of Greek polytheism. The power to whose action the wonders of divination were attributed by the Greeks was no one God, personal and holy, but a mixed crowd of gods and goddesses of all ranks, grades, and characters, nature-gods, deified heroes, earth-spirits, and ancestors. It was this debased theology which rendered the Greek religion incapable of producing from among its seers any one worthy of the title of prophet. A deeper vein of

<sup>1</sup> τὸ μαντικὸν γὰρ πᾶν φιλάργυρον γένος, *Soph. Antig.* 1055.

<sup>2</sup> Herod. v. 63, vi. 66.

religious thought did indeed find a partial expression in the mysteries, centring around some great ideas, such as the sense of sin, the need of purification, and the hope of immortality. Had the seers of Greece become the recognized exponents of these lofty and true conceptions, the issue might have been very different. But the opportunity was thrown away. Divination having identified itself with the popular mythology in an unspiritual and degrading association, deservedly shared its fall into disfavour and contempt. Those who in virtue of their natural endowments should have been seers in the higher sense of the word—discoverers and propagators of truth—forfeited their powers of spiritual vision, and became blind guides of a blind people.

We have cast this brief glance on the history of the rise and fall of Greek divination in the hope of discovering some principles of interpretation which may be of service in the study of the analogous institution among the Israelites. It remains now to be seen whether that expectation is in some measure to be realized. Making every allowance for the divergence of conditions in the two cases, shall we find the facts capable of being arranged under the same categories, and therefore presumably to be regarded as effects of the same causes? Was there in Israel the same substratum of natural psychic activity, providing (if the metaphor be permissible) the raw material for divination? For the moment abstracting our attention from those higher and more spiritual elements which were present in the Hebrew seer and finally became predominant in the prophet, we will take into consideration only those peculiarities of the seer which attracted the notice and aroused the wonder even of the spiritually

obtuse. On this side, at all events, there cannot be two opinions as to the closeness of the analogy between the Hebrew and the heathen seer. There is ample testimony to show that the Hebrew diviner and his successor the prophet possessed a power which the modern investigator into psychical matters is accustomed to call clairvoyance. Saul and his servant expect the seer to be able to tell them the whereabouts of their lost asses. Nathan reads the guilty secret of the king in spite of all the precautions taken to secure immunity from discovery. Ahijah recognizes at once the wife of Jeroboam, notwithstanding his blindness and her attempt to conceal her identity. Elisha speaks as though he might have expected to know without receiving any message what misfortune had overtaken the Shunamite woman, though on the particular occasion in question the knowledge is withheld from him.

Such instances point to the conclusion that in the matter of psychic endowment the Hebrew seer was even better equipped than his heathen counterpart. Nor do we minimize the action of the Divine Spirit by the supposition that in the religious education of the Hebrew race He selected to be diviners and prophets men who were distinguished from their fellows by exceptional abilities of this order. The prominent figures on the stage of religious history have been for the most part men whose great natural gifts are unmistakable. The subtle intellect, the golden eloquence, the indomitable will, the untiring energy, have not been wanting to them. The work which they did for God and the Church was not accomplished independently of the action of their natural abilities, but by their means ; although, of course, it is also true that these

powers in themselves provide no adequate explanation of the final result. They were the means of success because the Spirit of God worked upon them and through them, enlarging their range and directing their activity. For men become the messengers and instruments of God only when the powers which the Creative Spirit has originally bestowed through nature have been thus intensified and controlled. There is, therefore, nothing derogatory to the conception of Inspiration in supposing that the method of the Spirit in the case of the diviner was to heighten and direct psychic powers that belonged in some measure naturally to men destined for this office. As Samson's feats were performed through the exceptional increase of natural bodily strength under spiritual influence, so we may suppose the wonders of Hebrew divination to have been due to an analogous increase of natural mental power under the action of the same Spirit. Obviously this statement of the case assumes it to be a fact that the natural powers of the mind include in certain cases capacities of *telaesthesia* and *telepathy*. A generation since that assumption might have been dismissed as incredible. At the present day it will rank at the lowest as a highly probable hypothesis. Many authorities, and those of no mean weight, would declare it to be no longer an assumption, but a proven fact.

If we grant the existence of these psychic faculties in man, and their connexion with the powers of the seer, we shall find ourselves provided with a natural and unforced explanation of the outward analogies between Jewish and heathen divination. The two systems resembled one another for the simple reason that they rested upon the exercise of the same human faculties. At this point, however, we are confronted



with a further and a not less important question. If in Israel and in heathendom divination sprang from the same root, how was it that the development in the two cases was so astonishingly different? How was it that in the one case the spiritual descendant of the diviner was a prophet, a man of the highest possible moral standing, an Amos or an Isaiah, whereas in the other case he was a trickster and a cheat, like the charlatan delineated in the biting satire of Lucian's *Pseudomantis*? In seeking to answer this question it will be necessary to trace the course of the transition from divination to prophecy.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE TRANSITION FROM DIVINATION TO PROPHECY

It was a profoundly important crisis in the history of religion when the diviner made way for the prophet. The epoch-making transformation was accomplished within the compass of a few years. Yet, as is often the case, no less in the spiritual than in the physical world, a change sudden at the last had been long in preparation. Forces beneath the surface work uninterruptedly, but remain unsuspected until some sudden and startling upheaval attracts general notice. Frequently, also, the subsequent developments resulting from some sudden movement require centuries for their completion; but because the process is slow and gradual it easily escapes recognition. It is the initiatory and striking event which concentrates attention upon itself. Yet the true significance of a movement cannot be properly gauged unless due regard be accorded, not only to the events of the critical time, but also to the preliminary stages of preparation and the subsequent process of adaptation and modification. Dramatic and startling as was the emergence of prophecy from divination, it would be a palpable error to ignore the preparation which had preceded that sudden birth, or to forget the vastly important changes through which prophecy was afterwards to pass. The centuries which elapsed between the Sinaitic revelation and the establishment of the kingdom were a period

of gestation during which prophecy was in the womb of the religion of Jehovah, waiting for its due time to be born into the world. A further period of several centuries passed away before prophecy can be said to have reached a condition of maturity. Hence no investigation of the circumstances which attended the birth of prophecy can pretend to present any complete picture of the institution. Nevertheless a study of origins will often contribute valuable assistance towards the interpretation of the forces at work in later developments.

The Hebrew kingdom and the prophetic order were intimately connected together in their beginnings, the former being ushered into being under the auspices of the latter. It was the influence of the prophet Samuel, boldly used at a critical moment in the national history, which placed the king, Saul, upon the throne. But in what sense may Samuel be called the first of the prophets? Was he not, it may be urged, anticipated by a far greater prophet than himself in the person of Moses, the legislator and founder of the nation? Unquestionably the figure of Moses as delineated in the Pentateuch presents some very characteristic prophetic features; but it is possible that in these points the narrative reflects rather the conceptions of the age when it was composed than the historical reality. Of course the question can only be discussed upon a basis of agreement as to the dates of the component parts of the Pentateuch. Into these matters it is impossible to enter here. It will be enough to say that, assuming the views of the modern critical school to be in the main accurate, there is reason to think that the figure of Moses as depicted in the Pentateuch is in its details more ideal

than historical. In the book of Deuteronomy in particular Moses is drawn as the ideal prophet, the man directly and completely inspired by God. The language of the book deserves the closest scrutiny on account of the light which it throws upon the nature of Biblical inspiration ; but it must be remembered that it is evidence which belongs to the age of prophecy itself, and not to that of the Exodus. It must be appraised accordingly. The delineation of Moses in JE and in Deuteronomy is, in fact, a very complete exposition of the conception of inspiration prevalent in prophetic circles at a time when prophecy was displaying its highest qualities and exerting its greatest influence. The inspiration of Moses is depicted as something much deeper than a mere communication of knowledge or of power ; it is represented to be the outcome of an intercourse between the Divine Spirit and the human, analogous to the intercourse between friends (Exod. xxxiii. 11). Nor need it be supposed that in giving this interpretation to the picture of Moses, and in thus transferring to a later period the inferences which may be drawn therefrom, we are making any concession to that school of negative criticism which is inclined to relegate Moses and his work into a limbo of legend. On the contrary, the reality and the profound importance of the Mosaic revelation is assumed as the necessary starting-point of the religion of Israel, and therefore as the ultimate source from which flowed the stream of prophecy. It is a position entirely consistent with the view that the account given of inspiration in the Pentateuch is more in accordance with the conditions of the prophetic than of the Mosaic age.

Among the Judges there were some who exhibited certain traits of the prophet. They were the recipients

of communications from God. They were charged with special missions, and endowed with the power to carry them through. They triumphed over obstacles apparently insuperable. They cannot, however, be accounted prophets. There was something wanting. The critical moment had not yet arrived, nor the man in whom the change was to be consummated. The transformation of divination into prophecy may be compared with the transmutation of a baser metal into gold; the only crucible in which the change could be effected was the heart of a man. That man was Samuel. He it was who, beginning life as a diviner, died a prophet and the founder of the prophetic order. There is reason to think that it was he who created the Schools of the Prophets. But while it is evident that this institution survived for centuries, yet its real character and its place in the national life are problems involved in much obscurity. The scattered references are not sufficiently detailed nor circumstantial enough to be the ground of definite inferences. Samuel did a greater work for his country by inaugurating the line of those 'inspired' prophets who, acting sometimes in conjunction with the schools of the prophets, but more often in independence of them, were the guiding spirits of their generations, the messengers of God to His people. Other authority than their intense conviction of a personal mission they disdained to claim. Yet while thus asserting, and asserting justly, their independence, they were at the same time the inheritors of a great tradition which had begun with Samuel. Had he not pointed out the way, it might have remained untrodden. He it was who showed how the immense power which accumulates in the hands of men gifted with the



faculty of divination may be nobly exercised for the furtherance of the highest moral ends, for the promotion of righteousness and of the knowledge of God.

We will look a little more closely into the general conditions under which this momentous birth of prophecy occurred. Glancing back over the preceding centuries of disorganization, we cannot fail to see how, in spite of much disintegration and demoralization of the national life, the religious teaching of Moses never ceased to exert a purifying and refining influence upon the national character. Samuel could never have lifted divination into prophecy had it not been already raised by association with the religion of Jehovah to a height unattainable by ethnic divination. Polytheistic beliefs, as we have already had occasion to notice, inevitably brought the practice of divination into contempt and plunged it in degradation. For how could diviners, conceiving themselves to be the mouthpieces of divinities to whom every kind of evil was freely attributed, feel it their bounden duty to uphold the cause of virtue against vice? With the diviners of Israel it was otherwise. They spoke in the name of Jehovah, whose holiness had from the first been a foundation principle of their national religion. Although the early conception of that Divine Holiness may have been full of crudity and inconsistency, external and mechanical, narrow and harsh, yet it was there, and it was capable of development. It was a force acting continuously, and therefore bringing great results to accomplishment. Had there been no tradition previous to the time of Samuel in favour of a divination legitimately practised and beneficial in its effects, the conditions for the appearance of prophecy would not have been adequately forth-

coming. Doubtless the measures which Saul took for the extirpation of necromancy and witchcraft presented no new departure in Israelitish religion, but were the enforcement of a policy of repression previously left to private or local initiative. It is of no small significance that one of the first measures of the royal authority, in the establishment of which prophecy had taken the leading part, should have been directed against that kind of divination between which and prophecy there was an irreconcilable opposition. From its earliest days prophecy was aware what enemy it had most to fear. It was a life and death struggle. The extreme penalty was inflicted upon those who were convicted of dealing in the unholy traffic with the spirits of the dead. Even in later times, when the softening influences of civilization had had time to work, there was no mitigation of punishment for this offence. The law, Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live, was rigorously enforced.

The pure form of divination which was the seed of prophecy exhibited a noteworthy contrast with the dark secrecy of magic. That the results obtained in both cases were in a measure due to the operation of the natural psychic powers of man we have seen reason to think. But there was all the difference in the world between the one system which was ashamed to face the light and the other which was consecrated in the service of the national God. This consecration did not, of course, imply that the diviner used his special powers only for distinctly religious purposes. The story of Saul's original application to Samuel is sufficient witness to the contrary. But it meant that those who had recourse to the diviner must have felt it useless to turn to him for aid except in an innocent matter. This

separation of Hebrew divination from all that was secret and criminal removed an obstacle that would have fatally obstructed the evolution of prophecy.

We cannot fail to notice how this high moral standard of Hebrew divination found a conscientious exponent in Samuel. From the two sins of avarice and ambition, so common among professional diviners, he was conspicuously free. As judge he had never abused his opportunities. 'Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?' (1 Sam. xii. 3.) Doubtless the above passage belongs to one of the later sections of the books of Samuel. The narrative in this chapter is presented from the standpoint of a subsequent age. But though a long interval may have elapsed before the story was cast into its present shape, yet we have no reason to question the truth of Samuel's incorruptibility. The fact appears to be guaranteed by the whole tenor of the history. Moreover, he was no less devoid of the lust of power than of the meaner vice of covetousness. His action in furthering the establishment of the kingdom was tantamount to an abdication. When weak men abdicate there is likely to be little merit in an action which may be due to motives of timidity or to weariness of the cares of office. With the strong man it is otherwise. Of all the actions of his life it is his abdication which affords the most convincing proof alike of his strength of will, of his public spirit, and of his superiority to all selfish considerations. To stand aside in favour of the younger man and to leave in his hands the direction of affairs can have been no easy

matter. But Samuel was not unequal to the occasion or to the demand upon his patriotism. Convinced that the change was for the good of his people, he threw the whole weight of his influence on that side. So acting, he secured from the outset a close alliance between the new monarchy and the progressive elements in the national religion.

The assumption of this pregnant responsibility was a material factor in the development of prophecy. True, the diviner's intervention in critical national emergencies was a familiar incident in all ancient religions. But where else shall we find an example of the diviner using the privileges of his position in order to shape the polity of his nation upon the lines of righteousness and justice? Not, of course, that there could be any idea at such an early date of framing a constitution. Early monarchies were not constructed on any definite plan, with checks and safeguards against the abuse of power. They were rough attempts to meet present practical necessities. But Samuel, looking beyond the needs of the moment, set forth the ideal which a theocratic kingdom true to the principles of its inauguration might be expected to fulfil. He it was who insisted that the future king was to be the representative of the divine government, and that obedience to his authority was to be enforced by a religious sanction. He it was who, standing by the side of the first king, endeavoured to make him realize his responsibilities as the anointed of the Lord, and his obligation to use the royal prerogative as a means for the accomplishment of the divine purpose. Thus, within the limits possible at such a stage of human development, the diviner became not a statesman merely, but a statesman with a distinctly religious

purpose in view. It was the characteristic attitude of the Hebrew prophet, and it was first assumed by Samuel. In so using the diviner's influence as an instrument for the attainment of the religious and social welfare of the nation he raised divination on to that higher plane where it became prophecy.

The example thus set by Samuel inspired his followers to pursue the same method. Gradually (as we shall see in a later chapter) the lower and more mechanical features of divination dropped away from prophecy, which became in increasing measure a conscious relation between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man. But the change was far from rapid. The prophet Gad retains the name of seer (2 Sam. xxiv. 11). Traits of the diviner continue to manifest themselves. When Nathan becomes aware of David's sin it is not explicitly said that he received the information supernaturally or mysteriously ; but it would seem a natural inference so to understand the drift of the story. He declares, it is true, that David has given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme—a result which could not follow until the crime became publicly known. But the words will easily bear an interpretation in accordance with the view that till Nathan spoke David had successfully hidden his sin. If we understand the prophet to mean that so foul a deed could not remain permanently undiscovered and unpunished, we shall find nothing inconsistent in his expression with our belief that his information was derived from some supernatural source. Granting this, we may still hesitate whether to say that the fact was revealed to him by God, or that he learnt it through the supernatural quickening of his psychic capacity to read the thoughts of others. There is, indeed, not so much



difference as might appear at first sight between the two statements of the case. Truth, the knowledge of which is obtained by the use of powers divinely bestowed and divinely guided, may very properly be described as truth divinely revealed. And certainly Nathan turns his knowledge, however acquired, to the best account. He uses it in order to bring the erring king to repentance. Possession of such a secret would have placed unlimited power over the king in the hands of an unscrupulous person. That the knowledge was felt by its possessor to impose upon him a sacred commission from God shows that the successors of Samuel had learnt from him how to use the diviner's influence.

Another striking instance is forthcoming in the history of the prophet Ahijah. He, too, intervenes in the political affairs of the country, and does so in the name of the Lord. He is responsible for the division of the two kingdoms, somewhat as was Samuel for the establishment of the monarchy. That he possessed powers of divination appears from a later incident in his life. Years afterwards, when the division of the kingdoms was an accomplished fact, the child of Jeroboam fell sick, and the parents determined to apply to the prophet in order to learn what prospect there might be of recovery. The disguise which the wife of Jeroboam assumed was useless as a means of concealment. Her name and errand are known to the blind prophet, and the answer is given before the question is put. In a heathen country such supernatural knowledge would have enhanced the reputation of the seer; in Israel it was made the means of enforcing a lesson of righteousness. It gave weight to the words of condemnation which the prophet-seer addressed to the wife of the king who had sinned and was leading his

people into sin. The story affords an excellent illustration of the essential difference between divination in Israel and among the Gentiles. To the heathen divination was an empty marvel; to God's people it was a marvel with a moral purpose.

We should fail to read the meaning of Samuel's age rightly if we did not remember that neither the monarchy which he founded nor the prophetic order which he initiated was in its outward form a novel and unprecedented institution. On the contrary, there is every reason to think that externally both alike were framed upon models already laid down in the neighbouring countries. It was the informing spirit within which was different. With regard to the kingdom the point is clearly brought out in the Biblical narrative (1 Sam. viii. 5). Nor would it be correct to suppose that while the kingdom of Israel was theocratic in character, the neighbouring kings claimed a merely secular authority. So far as the relation between the national god and the national king was concerned there was but little, if any, difference between Israel and the surrounding Semitic tribes. They, too, held their king to be the vicegerent of their god, and to be under an obligation to carry out their god's commands. Mesha' claims to be acting under the direction of Chemosh in his action against Israel.<sup>1</sup> All these petty Syrian kingdoms were equally theocratic; but in Israel the character of the divine ruler was differently conceived. In their qualities Jehovah and Chemosh were sharply contrasted; the result was a corresponding contrast between the kingdoms established in their respective names.

In the matter of prophecy the question is less easy to decide, and there is considerable divergence of

<sup>1</sup> *Moabite Stone*, l. 14.

opinion among the authorities on the subject. It has, for example, been confidently asserted that there were prophets among the Canaanites previous to the immigration of the Israelites, and that consequently the latter were only adopting an institution indigenous to the country which they had conquered.<sup>1</sup> Kuenen likewise maintained that both the institution and its name were of Canaanite origin, basing his theory on the characteristic features of early prophecy, its abnormal excitement and infectious transmission from one person to another. Such symptoms, he argued, would more naturally arise in the worship of nature-gods, such as Baal and Astarte, than under the influence of the religion of the severe and holy Jehovah. 'The phenomena of ecstatic excitement which had hitherto appeared only among the adherents of the gods of the land, and certainly had not remained unobserved by the Israelites, now pass over to the servants of the national God Jahveh. Associations of Jahveh-prophets are formed. They agree with similar societies among the Canaanites in this respect, that they rouse the enthusiasm of their members by music and song.'<sup>2</sup> This piece of imaginative reconstruction may be plausible enough; nor would the dignity of Hebrew prophecy suffer any eclipse, supposing it were proved to have arisen by a process of modification out of an institution originally heathen. To Samuel would still belong the credit of being the founder of Hebrew prophecy, although upon this hypothesis his achievement would have consisted more in the adaptation of an already existing institution to higher purposes than in the creation of one entirely new. There is, therefore, no

<sup>1</sup> Wellhausen, *Israelit. und jüdische Gesch.*

<sup>2</sup> Kuenen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, p. 556.

*a priori* objection to such a theory of the origin of prophecy. But while admitting the plausibility of the conjecture we must needs remember that Kuenen's account of the matter is of the nature of guesswork rather than history. As Dr. A. B. Davidson has pointed out, there is no tittle of positive evidence indicating the existence of prophecy among the primitive Canaanites. 'We do not hear of such prophets till 200 years later, and these are not Canaanite but the priest-prophets of the Tyrian Baal.'<sup>1</sup>

Of recent years there has been a tendency in some quarters to exaggerate the amount of resemblance between the religion of Israel and the other religions of Western Asia. Of this tendency a striking example is afforded by Winckler's representation of prophecy as a common possession of such religions, and his insistence that Hebrew prophecy was no more than a peculiar type of a widely extended institution.<sup>2</sup> That Hebrew prophecy was the result of a development which in its beginnings can be traced back to very early times, and even to a period anterior to the differentiation of the Hebrew religion from the common ancestral belief of the Semites, is the very point on which we have been insisting. Divination was undoubtedly a common institution in the ancient world, and in Israel the diviner was the spiritual predecessor of the prophet. No human institution remains unchanged through any long period of time. Divination, subject like everything else to the operation of this general law, was unquestionably undergoing a process of transformation in the heathen world no less than in Israel. In some respects the conditions

<sup>1</sup> Hastings, *B. D.*, iv. 108.

<sup>2</sup> *History of Babylon and Assyria*, E. T., p. 157. Cf. Sellin, *Die alttestamentliche Religion im Rahmen der andern altorientalischen*, p. 76.

which determined this process of development among the Gentile nations were not altogether unlike those which prevailed in Palestine. We need not, therefore, be surprised if we discover something analogous to prophecy elsewhere. But we shall certainly find that the points of resemblance are superficial and of quite minor importance compared with the points of difference. For the paramount condition which determined the development of true prophecy in Israel was the controlling presence of the Spirit of God. Where this was wanting there could be no product of permanent spiritual value for the human race. Human faculties, normal or supernormal, were powerless in themselves to see the heavenly light and follow it. Yet these same faculties, created originally by the Spirit of Life and now used by Him as His means of communication with man, display under His influence an ever-widening range of activity. The prophets of Israel are the men in whom these capacities are found in a pre-eminent degree, and who willingly submit themselves to the spiritual guidance. As the process goes forward, prophecy draws further and further away from its starting-point in divination, becoming more and more an institution to which there is no parallel outside the limits of revelation. When the Deuteronomist uttered his fine eulogy of the prophet the movement of differentiation had run its course. Divination and prophecy stood over against one another in declared antagonism. Yet, far as prophecy had travelled, it still retained some of those psychological features which had manifested themselves in divination. Notable among these is the highly strung psychic disposition of the prophet, evidence of which will present itself when we turn to the next division of our subject.



## CHAPTER V

### THE PROPHETIC EXCITATION : ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS

ONE of the chief, if not the most marked characteristic of the prophetic writings is the vehemence with which the authors assert their claim to speak in the name of Jehovah. And it is very plain that what they thus declared with every emphasis of repetition they believed to the very bottom of their hearts. Nothing less than an invincible conviction of the reality of their divine commission could have endowed them with the requisite courage to face opposition, general odium, persecution, and the imminent danger of violent death. On them devolved the invidious and unwelcome task of denouncing the divine wrath against the prevailing national sins, and of proclaiming the punishment which in default of penitence would inevitably ensue. On many critical occasions in the national history they were impelled by their unflinching sense of duty to set themselves in direct opposition to the current of popular opinion. It is true there were times when the prophet was charged with an easier and a happier task. Comfort and encouragement formed part of the prophetic message no less truly, though much less frequently, than warning and rebuke. At rare intervals, as, for example, after the retirement of the Assyrian army under Sennacherib, the prophet was the popular hero of the hour. Far oftener he was the object of general suspicion and

dislike, if not of open enmity. No body of men could have endured so severe and so long-continued a strain if they had not been upheld by a profound sense of their divine mission. How this conviction established itself in their minds is one of the most fundamental problems of the psychology of Revelation.

No one will dispute the statement that in order to discover the sources of the prophet's sense of mission we must turn to the prophet's own description of his religious experiences. In the analysis of those most remarkable pieces of religious autobiography must be sought the clue to the answer of this question. At the same time there is room for considerable divergence of opinion as to the measure of finality which should be assigned to the prophet's account of his call, and of the visions and spiritual experiences which accompanied or constituted that critical event in his life. So long as the prophet was considered to be no more than an instrument in the hands of Providence, speaking the words put into his mouth as mechanically as the flute produces sound under the influence of the breath of the player, the question could not even be raised. While the word of the prophet was taken without qualification as equivalent to the word of God, it followed that all he said as to the visions which he saw and the voices which he heard merited unquestioning acceptance. It was as unseemly, and indeed as impossible, for man to criticize the narrative of the conditions under which the message was received, as it would have been to discriminate between the various parts of the message. Inspiration and all connected with it being supposed to lie entirely outside the range of ordinary human experience, men lacked any standard of comparison by which to test

the prophet's declarations. His testimony, if accepted at all, was necessarily accepted without reservation as literally and precisely true. But when qualifications began to be introduced into this rigid mechanical theory of inspiration, and some measure of recognition was extended to the human element in revelation, there was no longer any presumption in the attempt to compute the value of the prophet's claim to speak in the name of God. How far was the claim justified in fact? Was his account of his call and all that it implied the literal truth in its naked reality, or was it only the prophet's conception of the truth? Very different estimates have been put forward in answer to this question. In some cases the criticism has been carried to such length as practically to strip the prophet of all supernatural authority, and to leave him nothing but the influence possessed by any man of commanding genius. Thus Kuenen, with his strong bias against the supernatural, treated as unworthy of consideration the claim of the prophets to authoritative inspiration. Regarding them as no more than great moral teachers with a noble and profound conviction of the moral purpose and government of the world, he attached little, if any, importance to their narratives of supernatural visitations. In his opinion these were due to their participation in the common religious limitations of their age, and are signs rather of their human weakness than of any superhuman strength added to them from above. It is doubtless the fact that the prophets had a correct insight into the truth that national sin would bring in its train national punishment, and that national apostasy could have no other issue but national annihilation. No one would deny that many of their gloomy predictions are the outcome and expres-

sion of their vivid apprehension of this principle of righteousness. But to find in their warnings of coming disaster nothing more than this convicts the critic of yielding to the pressure of prejudice. No unbiassed student of Hebrew prophecy is likely to be content with this account of the matter. It is simple, certainly; but it is simple because it ignores much of the evidence, or, at any rate, underrates its force and extent. A purely natural account of the psychological phenomena of prophecy cannot be true to fact. Room must be found for the action of the supernatural.

That the prophet was greatly influenced and possibly greatly hampered by the current religious conceptions of his age we have no reason to deny. The account which he gives of the supernatural experiences through which he passed will be in no small measure determined by the same limitations. He would not have been human had it been otherwise. We cannot do better than recall certain weighty and well-considered words used with reference to the narratives of miraculous events in the gospels. 'We may be sure that if the miracles of the first century had been wrought before trained spectators of the twentieth, the version of them would have been quite different. But to suppose this is to suppose what is impossible, because all God's dealings with men are adapted to the age to which they belong, and cannot be transferred to another age.'<sup>1</sup> This principle is of universal application, and is valid whether the narrator be an onlooker and historian as in the case of the evangelists, or himself the subject of the miraculous manifestation as was the prophet. It is certain that a prophet narrating to us the circumstances of his call, or relating some vision subsequently

<sup>1</sup> Sanday, *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 104.

vouchsafed to him, will speak in terms proper to the time in which he lived. Let the fact be duly remembered and every allowance made for it in our final estimate of the worth of the narrative. But that some genuine supernatural event was the occasion of the prophet's experience will surely not be denied, except by those whose minds are already made up in an adverse direction. These events seem to have recorded themselves in the minds of the prophets under the forms of visions and voices. It is, therefore, with the character of this record and with the forms which it assumed that we shall be concerned. The main source of information will, of course, be the prophet's own words considered in the light of that principle of relativity, the importance of which must never be lost sight of. But there will also be much to be learnt from a comparison of the prophet's experience with that of others who have likewise seen spiritual sights and heard spiritual messages. The illustrations are to be found for the most part in the lives of the saints, whose visions considered as spiritual experiences must be reckoned to be parallel with the visions of the prophets. The differentia of the revelation to the prophet lay in the content of the communication to him, and in its permanent influence upon the religious history of the world, rather than in the manner of its reception.

Professor Davidson has devoted an exceedingly interesting chapter to the discussion of the nature of prophetic inspiration. His object of study he defines to be an analysis of the prophetic state. At the outset he draws a distinction between that which he conceives to be a proper subject of investigation and that which lies beyond the bound of human inquiry. 'What we



are going to inquire into,' he writes, 'is the state of the prophet's mind when receiving or perceiving the prophetic truth, not what it was that put his mind into that state, much less how that which put his mind into that state did so.' <sup>1</sup> It is an important distinction. The true objective of the psychological study of prophecy is description rather than explanation. Not that any hard and fast line can be drawn between the two. Accurate apprehension of the facts and a clear description of them is the first step towards an adequate explanation. Of one thing we may rest assured, that no explanation will banish from these facts the element of mystery. Those who have experienced the abiding power of the prophetic message over the human soul will know better than to be content with any account of the matter which reduces the whole process to the level of a purely natural event. Whatever light may be thrown upon the phenomena of prophecy by comparison with other religious experiences, the innermost secret will remain inviolate. Converse between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man, such as was the prerequisite condition of prophecy, lies in a region which cannot be surveyed, mapped, and measured by any instrument at our disposal. The attempt to describe the prophetic state in terms of our ordinary mental life is no insidious attack upon belief in the divine origin of that state.

In a specially noteworthy passage Professor Davidson distinguishes between various grades of prophetic excitation. After referring to the close connexion between Old Testament and New Testament prophecy, and to the light which the latter may throw upon the former, he proceeds :

<sup>1</sup> *Old Testament Prophecy*, p. 115.

From all this we may safely draw the following conclusions: First, that much prophetic utterance was made without any excitation both in the Old Testament and in the New; that this utterance embraced not only the enunciation of general theocratic truths but also of specific predictions; that the form of the prophetic utterance did not depend on the amount of the excitation, and that what is most peculiar in it, its timelessness, did not depend on the method of intuition by which the truth was received. Second, that very often a certain amount of excitation accompanied the utterance, or at least the perception of the prophetic truth. This can be paralleled by the higher activity of mind among ourselves in thought or feeling, especially in high religious or poetical thought. Third, that this excitation went through many degrees, and might reach finally to a waking trance. The lower states of it, perhaps, were greatly parallel to our states of mental abstraction, when, the action of the mind being intense, the senses are less acute, and impressions from without are either fainter or less heeded, so that a certain unconsciousness of external surroundings ensues. In the higher stages the activity of the mind becomes so intense that it is not only insensible to influences from without, but loses reflective control over its own operations, though not the consciousness of them; and these operations accordingly go on according to laws which are difficult to define. This is the condition called ecstasy. Fourth, not only the waking trance, but also the sleeping state could be made the means of revelation which comprehended both the vision and the dream.<sup>1</sup>

It is worth noting that the conclusions laid down in this passage, with their important bearing on the question of the psychology of prophecy, have commended themselves to the deliberate judgement of so careful and trusted an authority as Professor Davidson. The essential point would seem to be this, that the

<sup>1</sup> Old Testament Prophecy, p. 121.

degree of inspiration can in no wise be supposed to vary in proportion to the amount of mental agitation. Some of the profoundest and most vital of the prophetic revelations were probably received by the prophet without any disturbance of the normal poise and balance of his mind. Such truths may have come slowly into the mind of the thinker, gradually shaping themselves and growing by almost imperceptible intervals from conjectures to certainties. Other truths may have flashed upon the inward vision with a sudden and overwhelming illumination. It would be an error to suppose that the truth which slowly emerged into the prophet's consciousness was therefore less inspired and less due to the direct action of the Spirit of God than that other which came in a moment, in a time of ecstasy, in a dream, or in a vision. It would be a mechanical and unworthy conception of Inspiration which restricted the use of the word to those cases in which new religious truth manifested itself so suddenly as to occasion a shock of surprise. Revelation may come slowly as the dawn or suddenly as the lightning flash. In both cases the light is from God. Presumably truths which the prophet first realized when he was in a state of trance or ecstasy did produce in his mind the sensation of an utterly unexpected discovery. But we have no reason on that account to attribute to them a higher measure of inspiration.

That the Hebrews themselves did not consider visions to be essential to prophecy has been inferred from the words of the Pentateuch about the inspiration of Moses. 'If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all my house. With

him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches ; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold (Num. xii. 6-8). With reference to this passage Dr. Robertson Smith has written as follows : ' In the twelfth chapter of Numbers which belongs to the part of the Pentateuch composed before the rise of written prophecy, Moses, who received his revelation in plain words not involved in symbolic imagery, is placed above those prophets to whom Jehovah speaks in vision or dream.' <sup>1</sup> True inferences are sometimes drawn from incorrect premisses. And though it be perfectly true that vision is not a necessary element in prophecy it is questionable whether this particular passage will justify the conclusion. It is clear that the mode in which Moses received his revelations is here contrasted with that in which the prophets received theirs, viz. by vision and dream ; but we are not at liberty to infer that because this kind of mystic experience is disclaimed in his case, he must therefore have obtained his divine knowledge by means of a plain statement of the truth and have developed it by the ordinary processes of the intellect. So far from this having been the meaning of the writer he seems to attribute to Moses a relation with the Spirit of God even further removed from the common level of human thought than is the mystic experience of the seer. Moses is represented as one who has passed above and beyond the region of vision into a condition where the immediate apprehension of divine mysteries has ceased to be an exceptional experience, as it remains to the visionary, and has become the normal state of his consciousness. To learn the truth from God has become to him as familiar and as accustomed

<sup>1</sup> W. Robertson Smith, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 220.

an occurrence as is for the ordinary man a conversation with his friend. We cannot therefore find in this passage any depreciation of vision as a means of arriving at the truth compared with the normal exercise of human faculties. That which is superior to and more effective than vision is a condition of the soul even more exceptional and more mysterious than vision itself.

Hence, while the mental excitation which found its highest expression in trance and ecstasy was admittedly no indispensable condition of prophecy, yet it played a very large and important part in the history of prophecy. We may even think that Dr. Davidson's statement of the case does somewhat scanty justice to this factor of Inspiration. There would be very little reality or truth in any picture of the Hebrew prophet which ignored or disparaged his visionary powers. Granted that they were not actually of the essence of his prophetic equipment, yet they cannot be dismissed as unnecessary excrescences of his character. If the highest kind of prophecy has been possible independently of the vision or the voice from heaven, it does not therefore follow that the first steps in the development of this means of revelation could have been surmounted without their aid. And even this view relegates voices and visions to a position of relative inferiority ; it suggests that they are mere temporary accommodations to a condition of immaturity from which man subsequently emerges. Whereas there is much to be said in favour of the contrary opinion that these mystic experiences constitute one of the permanent modes by which the mind of man becomes receptive of spiritual truth ; and that in all ages there are some souls who find their



way along this road to a knowledge of God and of His ways. To regard the conveyance of revelation through vision as a mere concession to a lower stage of civilization and intellectual attainment may flatter our sense of superiority over past ages ; but it argues a narrow conception of the immense variety of the possible modes of Inspiration. Perhaps, too, our disparagement of the intuition of truth in ecstasy is due not so much to our progress in spiritual matters as to our own natural incapacity for that special mode of acquiring spiritual knowledge. Considered on its own merits the prophet's vision may be as effectual a means of spiritual enlightenment as the most profound and the most acute process of reasoning.

There are some other kinds of mental excitation which present noteworthy points of comparison with that of the prophet. Amongst these must be reckoned the disturbance of the faculties which overtakes men of creative genius at the crisis of composition. 'The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling' is indicative of the turmoil of spirit within. Yet we shall be ready to admit that his agitation, so far from reducing his power to see and give adequate expression to the truth, is the condition of its exercise. From the philosopher's point of view knowledge so obtained is at a discount, as lacking the kind of proof which he demands. It will be remembered, for example, what criticism the Platonic Socrates passes upon the poets.<sup>1</sup> He is astonished at their unconsciousness of the full meaning of their own utterances. They produce their effusions under the influence of enthusiasm like diviners.<sup>2</sup> They could not, therefore, make good any claim to the possession of the kind of wisdom in the quest of which

<sup>1</sup> *Apolo* γ, p. 22.    <sup>2</sup> ἐνθουσιάζοντες ὥσπερ θεομάντις καὶ χρησμοδοί.

he was engaged. Because they were not critical of their own methods, nor competent to analyse their own processes of thought, they failed in a point which he regarded as essential. To this reproach the poets might fairly have retorted that the test was unfair and the condemnation consequently invalid. Intuition had its own methods and must be judged on its own merits. The absence of the self-conscious criticism, which would of necessity have been in contradiction with their 'enthusiasm', was detrimental neither to the truth nor to the beauty of their work. Although prophecy and poetry move on different planes, yet in this matter of excitation the same rule is applicable. The prophets, no less than the poets, have spoken under the influence of enthusiasm. Consequently, they too have been unable to adopt the detached and contemplative attitude of the critic. They too have not concerned themselves to offer a reasoned proof of the truths which they have unhesitatingly asserted. They too have trusted to their intuitions rather than to any process of argument. They too have been justified in their procedure by the intensity of the influence which has emanated from their works. If we have learnt not to be afraid of enthusiasm in action we need not shrink from recognizing its importance in the realm of thought. In both departments it is one of the most energetic factors of progress.

Considerations such as these, serve to introduce a conclusion to which the plain facts of Hebrew prophecy seem to point. However true it be that in Old Testament times prophecy of the highest type was occasionally free from all abnormal excitation, it is equally true that such cases were exceptional. New religious truth commonly effected its entrance into the

mind of the prophet under conditions different from those of mere commonplace, every-day thinking. And in this fact lies the justification of the inquiry which we are pursuing into the mental conditions accompanying the moments of inspiration. Had those conditions been commonly indistinguishable from man's normal state there would have been no advantage to be gained from the examination. While amply admitting that Inspiration is not essentially dependent on any special excitation, and that the inspired man in the very moment of his inspiration may be as unemotionally self-possessed as the mathematician or the man of science, yet we believe the facts to have been generally otherwise. Prophets, like poets, have even exhibited mental traits and symptoms, which the undiscerning have not distinguished from those of madness; they have been obviously 'not like other people'. And whereas sometimes this divergence from the ordinary type has been the means of attracting to them disciples, it has at other times been cast in their teeth as a reproach. In either case it was a fact patent to the onlooker whether sympathetic or the reverse. That prophecy and madness were allied was as obvious then, as the acknowledged kinship of madness and genius has since become. We need not be shy of acknowledging the fact. The time has passed when prophecy and other remarkable religious phenomena could be superciliously dismissed as nothing better than the product of an unsound mind. In the eighteenth century (it has been said<sup>1</sup>) controversialists made the mistake of setting up a false issue between supernaturalism and fraud. Miracles—so ran their dilemma—must be due either to Divine action or to

<sup>1</sup> G. R. D'Allonnes, *Psychologie d'une Religion*, p. 1.

human trickery. A less crude but equally misleading alternative found favour during part of the nineteenth century, when in the place of fraud was substituted the conception of mental pathology. Under the influence of a strong anti-religious prejudice the seer and the prophet were contemptuously reckoned up as men who, in a more enlightened age, would have been treated as sufferers from various forms of mental degeneracy. Abnormal in a sense they were. But abnormality is not invariably a mark of inferiority. It may be at once the penalty and the privilege of the highest genius. In the prophet it was this, and it was yet more. It was the effect of the presence of the Spirit of God.

## CHAPTER VI

### PROPHETIC AUDITION

HITHERTO, we have attempted no more than to show cause for attributing to the prophet a disposition peculiarly liable to mystical influences. The time has now come for a closer study of the character which those influences assumed and the effects which they produced on the prophet's mind. We have already pointed out the fact that the prophetic career is the direct outcome of the spiritual crisis described as the prophet's call. The testimony of the three greater prophets is consentient and is unmistakable. And in all three cases the call came to them in the form of a vision. Isaiah sees the Lord high and lifted up, hears the heavenly hymn, and himself makes answer to the Divine voice. So also was it with Jeremiah and with Ezekiel. What then are we to make of these visions and these voices? What degree of reality or objectivity are we to assign to them? In what sense were they real, or merely subjective phenomena? And if the latter, how far were they legitimate grounds for the prophet's conviction of his mission, and for his assurance of the truth of the message which he delivered?

In dealing with questions of this kind it is of the utmost importance that we should not allow our thoughts to be entirely governed by the superficial alternatives of real and imaginary, objective and subjective, as though the prophetic experience must



of necessity fall under one or other of these two categories, and could be judged accordingly. If we had been able to ask the prophet himself whether he saw the visions with his bodily eyes and heard the voices with his bodily ears, it is probable that he would have been unable to give any definite answer ; and perhaps he would not have considered the question worth answering. This at all events, is the conclusion suggested by the words of S. Paul. He believed unquestioningly in the positive reality of the vision which he had seen in the third heaven, and of the unspeakable words which he had heard (2 Cor. xii. 2). At the same time he was quite uncertain and apparently quite indifferent whether he had been in the body or out of the body at the time. True, there is only a partial correspondence between our categories of objective and subjective, and S. Paul's distinction between in the body and out of the body ; but partial though it be, it is sufficiently close to enable us to make sure that S. Paul was far more concerned with the meaning of his revelations than with the question of the mode in which they had come to him. What did it matter whether it was the ear of the body or the ear of the soul which had caught the sounds ? The point of importance was that the revelation should have come from God. So we may suppose that the earlier prophets would have been uncertain as to the particular means by which the Divine communication was made to them, while they were ready to stake their lives on the truth and reality of the commission which they had thus received.

In some cases an entranced person has been conscious of receiving a message in words, and yet has known all the while that it is not the ear of the body but the

ear of the soul which listens. The fact is well exemplified in the case of S. Theresa, who is specially explicit on the point. 'The words are very distinctly formed but by the bodily ear they are not heard. They are however, much more clearly understood than they would be if they were heard by the ear. It is impossible not to understand them, whatever resistance we may offer. . . . In this locution of God addressed to the soul there is no escape, for in spite of ourselves we must listen.'<sup>1</sup> There is a striking similarity between ancient prophet and mediaeval saint in their common recognition of man's complete passivity in the reception of the message. Similarly S. Theresa distinguishes between the sight of the bodily eyes and the sight that is peculiar to the condition of vision. 'I saw Him,' she writes with regard to a vision of Christ, 'with the eyes of my soul more distinctly than I could have seen him with the eyes of my body.'<sup>2</sup> There have been, of course, other visionaries who have maintained a contrary view, and have asserted that they saw their visions with their bodily eyes as clearly as they saw the sights of this earth. It was so with Joan of Arc, as the following questions and answers from her examination testify. 'What apparition did you see first?' 'S. Michael. He was not alone but was surrounded by many angels.' 'You saw them actually and bodily?' 'I saw them with my bodily eyes as well as I see you, and when they vanished I wept and would fain that they had taken me with them.'<sup>3</sup> With this divergent testimony before us we may well hesitate as to the precise meaning of the prophet's words, 'I saw the Lord.'

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Granger, *The Soul of a Christian*, p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> L. P. de Julleville, *Joan of Arc*, p. 115.

Before, however, proceeding to give further consideration to the question of the prophetic visions it will be well to devote some thought to the cognate problem of the prophetic voices. Spiritual vision and spiritual audition are so closely connected together as practically to present one field of investigation. At the threshold we are met with a material question, which it is easier to put than to answer. Was it a common experience for the prophets to receive their revelations by means of voices heard in a state of trance or ecstasy? The reply will depend upon the force and meaning assigned to those frequently repeated prophetic formulae. Thus saith the Lord, and, The oracle of the Lord. Commentators have varied over a wide range in their interpretation of these phrases. There have been some who have boldly maintained that the formula always introduces a verbally inspired message from God, and that whether the voice was perceived in trance or in the sober waking state, it was, at all events, actually heard by the prophet, whose function consisted only in remembering and in repeating it. In other words, the doctrine of verbal inspiration no longer asserted of Scripture as a whole, has been retained in reference to those passages to which is prefixed this solemn declaration. Apart, however, from any *a priori* objections which might be urged with force against this theory, it is beset with difficulties. It presupposes a fundamental difference beyond all calculation and measurement between passages so dictated by the Holy Spirit, and the remainder of the prophetic writings that cannot in the same fashion claim a divine origin. Yet of this difference there is no outward sign. The literary style is unaltered, running on with no obvious break between the supposed

divine utterances and the exhortations made in the prophet's own name. This significant fact comes under observation throughout the prophetic books, in Amos, in Isaiah, in Jeremiah and in Deutero-Isaiah. In order to account for it upholders of the theory of dictation must have recourse to the somewhat desperate expedient of the supposition that the dictating Spirit accommodated Himself in each case to the style of the prophet in question.

In order to avoid the difficulty described in the preceding paragraph it has been maintained<sup>1</sup> that while the truth in its bare outline came to the prophet by means of a voice from heaven, its full expression and exposition was a task entrusted to the prophet. There was, if the matter may be so expressed, a division of labour. The supreme thought was the Divine revelation ; its development and interpretation in language was the prophet's contribution. This is a theory which so far as it goes, satisfies the conditions of the problem. It allows both for a factor of Inspiration and for a corresponding factor of human participation. It accounts reasonably enough for the presence of the peculiarities of the prophet's style in the divine message without representing that message as nothing more than the creation of the prophet's own mind. And yet the explanation cannot be said to be completely satisfactory. It fails to take account of the fact that the idiosyncrasy of the prophet makes itself felt not only in the language but also in the contents of the message. Precisely as the language in which the communication is couched is determined by the prophet's education and environment, so also its tenor exhibits a definite relation to his previous religious experience. New truth

<sup>1</sup> F. E. König, *Offenbarungsbegriff des Alten Testaments*.

comes to him, but it comes in a form strictly conditioned by the position already reached by him in the line of moral and mental development. If in this way both the manner and the matter of the message display evident marks of the influence of the prophet's character and temperament we cannot rest satisfied with a theory which draws a sharp line of distinction between the two, making the one to be the prophet's own work, the other the work of the Spirit.

And further, the above theory fails to utilize any of the knowledge that has been recently acquired, with regard to what may be called the physiological basis of trance voices. It treats the voice as though it were absolutely and without qualification, a supernatural phenomenon, and therefore incapable of being brought into relation with any of the facts of nature. Yet there is no reason why we should hesitate to illustrate from much lower levels of mental life, the action of a force that exhibited its highest possibilities in the revelations to the prophets. Let it be granted that considered on their material or natural side the voices which the prophets heard were not essentially dissimilar from those which have no connexion with Inspiration, it will not, therefore, follow that the revelation will lose any of its authoritative character. When once we have fully grasped the principle that the authority of a revelation is not really authenticated by the circumstances of its communication but by the nature of its contents, we shall no longer feel ourselves bound in the interest of revealed religion to demand that divine truth should have entered the soul of man along a channel reserved for its own peculiar use. If the truth be in fact from God, it is none the less worthy of acceptance, because it is revealed to the



prophet or the saint by a means which, in the case of a sinner, may serve a very different purpose. If with the same mouth we can both praise God and curse our brother, it is not impossible that with the same spiritual ear man should both hear the truth of God and also, perhaps, the idle imaginations of his own heart, or still worse, the falsehoods of the devil.

We may now see what is to be said in favour of the view that the prophets did actually hear voices, and that these voices came to them in virtue of their capacity for sensory automatism. There is a curious passage in Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in which that remarkable mystic gives his interpretation of the Old Testament prophets' claim to have heard the voice of God: 'The Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with me and I asked them how they dared so roundly to assert that God spoke to them, and whether they did not think at the time that they would be misunderstood, and so be the cause of imposition? Isaiah answered, "I saw no God nor heard any in a finite organical perception, but my senses discover'd the Infinite in everything, and as I was then persuaded and remained confirmed that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences, but wrote.'<sup>1</sup> It is strange that one like Blake, to whom mystical visions were so familiar, should have denied to the prophets any similar experiences. When we give due weight to the combined boldness and deep sense of responsibility with which the prophets come forward and declare, 'Thus saith the Lord,' we cannot but feel that something more lies behind the expression than a mere subjective certainty of being in the right. Remembering the intensity of the

<sup>1</sup> Langridge, *William Blake*, p. 101.

effect produced upon the lives of many saintly persons by the hearing of spiritual voices, and recalling how the prophets themselves, on more than one occasion, declare that they have heard such voices in vision, we shall find it difficult to resist the conclusion that a psychic audition of this kind must have been the spiritual experience that originally gave rise to the use of the phrase, 'Thus saith the Lord.'

A careful examination of the text of the prophetic books reveals the fact that this reference of the prophetic message to the Divine voice, while exceedingly common in Amos, becomes much less so in his successors of the eighth century.<sup>1</sup> Its frequency, however, is restored in the prophets who saw the fall of Jerusalem and the Exile. How is this literary phenomenon to be interpreted? It suggests two conclusions of importance. In the first place it appears that the expression may very well have acquired in some measure a conventional use. It would be obviously absurd to suppose that every time any one of the prophets takes these words upon his lips he does so in virtue of some definite psychic experience in the way of audition. All that we desire to urge is that the expression could scarcely have come into use had there not been originally some substratum of mystical hearing. When once the phrase had become part of the prophetic vocabulary there is no reason why it should not have been often used without any such direct reference. It may have become a recognized mode of expressing the prophet's conviction that he was uttering the very truth of God. To admit that the phrase gradually assumed this meaning under the influence of a prophetic tradition

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Giesebrecht, *Die Berufsbegabung der alttestamentlichen Propheten*, pp. 39 ff.

is a very different thing from asserting that it could never have meant anything else. Amos certainly uses the expression repeatedly within the brief compass of his comparatively short book ; and Amos exhibits the traits of a strongly developed psychic temperament. He sees vision after vision, and delivers oracle after oracle. It is he also who gives most vehement expression to the sense of being impelled to speak by a power outside himself (iii. 8). In order of time he stands nearest of all the literary prophets to those excited and frenzied companies of the prophets described in the books of Samuel. It is true that he himself repudiates any connexion with the associations of the sons of the prophets (vii. 14). But from the failure of the priest of Bethel to distinguish him from those who made their living by prophecy (v. 12) we may infer that in external characteristics, at all events, he resembled the prophets of his time. And this resemblance, extending beyond mere dress and bearing and manner of speech, may well have embraced the psychic peculiarities which were the basis of the seer's powers. Such a man, it is highly probable, would have frequently heard voices speaking to him, and would have reproduced them in his preaching with the preface, 'Thus saith the Lord.' There is much in his prophecies to suggest that he was familiar with the conditions of psychic exaltation, and that his utterances were based on convictions reached under this influence. More than this cannot be asserted with confidence. The attempt made by some extreme defenders of the rigid theory of the inspiration of prophecy to represent the prophet as only the mouthpiece of the divine voice breaks down even in his case. His oracles (ch. i. ii) are, it will be remembered, cast into a set form beginning

with a fixed formula. Hence, it seems evident that the form of the prophecy must have been determined by his own conscious and deliberate choice of words, though the underlying conviction of the impending doom of the erring nations is just such a certainty as may have established itself in the prophet's mind when he was in a state of trance. Nor is there anything out of accord with the laws of the psychology of trance in supposing that while entranced he seemed to hear the truth put into actual words.

We have interpreted the recurrent use of the formula, 'Thus saith the Lord,' by Amos as probably due to the frequent recurrence in his case of psychic experiences. The same formula, seldom used by Hosea and Isaiah, reappears constantly on the pages of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. But we should not be justified in drawing the same inference as before. We have already had occasion to notice that the expression may have come to be used in a measure conventionally, and we can see reasons why this conventional use should have received special emphasis at this later time. It was a period when the clue to the right course of national action was hard to find and still harder to follow. Of blind guides who professed to speak in the name of the Lord there was no lack. Jeremiah was stung into a very passion of resentment against the men who falsely claimed the divine warrant for counsel fraught with disastrous consequences. In opposition to them he was never tired of insisting that he was the true spokesman of Jehovah, faithfully foretelling the downfall of the city, not they with their smooth prophecies of rescue and deliverance. Hence it is in the circumstances of his time rather than in any peculiarity of his own mystical experience that we find

the explanation of his constant use of the formula. At the same time the record of his initial vision indicates that once at least in his life he had known what it was to learn a lesson of life-long importance through vision and voice from heaven.

Lastly, we must deal with the question whether prophetic audition can properly be reckoned as an instance of sensory automatism. Granting that the prophet, as a matter of fact, heard voices speaking to him in trance, can we give any psychological description of his experience? The psychology which we shall have to call to our aid has wider limits than that which forms the subject of the textbooks, and which restricts itself to the consideration of the normal modes of attention, perception, association, and other functions of the mind. We must rather follow the guidance of those who have devoted themselves to the study of the human mind in its abnormal and supernormal activities.<sup>1</sup> The science may be still in its infancy, and many of its present results will undoubtedly require revision in the light of further observations; but whatever judgement we may feel inclined to pass upon some of the theories put forward in connexion with the new psychology we may gladly recognize how aptly many of the facts collected and systematized for its own purposes serve to illustrate the histories of saint and prophet.

Sensory automatism has been defined to be 'the products of inner vision or inner audition externalized into quasi-percepts'.<sup>2</sup> Inner vision and audition cover a wide range from the mere mind-picture or mind-sound, which we summon up at will in imagination,

<sup>1</sup> I refer especially to F. W. H. Myers, *Human Personality*.

<sup>2</sup> Myers, *Human Personality*, i. 222.



to the fully formed and complete hallucination. Now hallucination is a word hampered with exceedingly invidious associations; and if it were possible to avoid its use in this connexion, perhaps it would be well to do so. But no convenient synonym exists, and therefore it seems preferable to retain the word, upon the definite understanding that it is used in a purely neutral sense with no evil and sinister suggestion about it. As has been quite truly said, there has been up till recently a facile assumption that all hallucinations or sensory automatisms *must* be due to physical malady. It is this assumption which needs to be boldly challenged. That physical malady is frequently the cause of hallucinations, is, of course, an admitted fact. But to jump to the conclusion that therefore all hallucinations have this source is logically unsound; and indeed, what evidence there is points the other way. The result of a widespread and carefully conducted inquiry seems to show that a great number of sensory automatisms occur among sane and healthy persons.<sup>1</sup> This is a cardinal fact in the light of which the whole question needs to be reconsidered. Hallucinations are not necessarily morbid like the terrifying spectres which present themselves to the drunkard or to the delirious patient. Who would venture to stigmatize with this term of reproach the hallucinations which according to the records of the artists themselves have sometimes preceded or accompanied the supreme triumphs of their genius?

That hallucination is only accidentally and not essentially associated with disease is well stated in the following paragraph. 'Often, of course, they

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

accompany disease ; but that is only to say that the central sensory tracts, like any other part of the organism, are capable of morbid as well as of healthful stimulus. Taken in itself the mere fact of the quasi-externalization of a centrally initiated image indicates strong central stimulation, and absolutely nothing more. There is no physiological law whatever which can tell us what degree of vividness our central pictures may assume consistently with health—short of the point where they get to be so indistinguishable from external perceptions that, as in madness, they interfere with the rational conduct of life. That point no well-attested case of veridical hallucinations, so far as my knowledge goes, has yet approached.’<sup>1</sup> We have to conceive of the hallucination as a sight or sound of which the originating cause lies within the mind of the percipient. It is not a mental image projected outwards through some confusion of the mind. There are, it is true, different grades of strength in hallucination. The less pronounced type have been described as pseudo-hallucinations, and are distinguishable as being consciously seen by the mental, not the bodily eye. From ordinary imaginations they differ by their vividness, minuteness of detail, and apparently complete spontaneity. The mind is unconscious of summoning or controlling their appearance. Complete hallucination on the other hand is ‘a strictly sensational form of consciousness, as good and true a sensation as if there were a real object there. The object happens not to be there, that is all’.<sup>2</sup> From the point of view of the ordinary psychologist, who is concerned with analysis of the relation existing between the operations

<sup>1</sup> Myers, *Human Personality*, i. 234.

<sup>2</sup> W. James, *Principles of Psychology*, ii. 115.

of the human mind and the facts of the external world, hallucination must always be viewed with suspicion. If the object be not there, the due correspondence between the inner world of consciousness and the outer world of hard fact seems to be upset. But there are other points of view from which the undisturbed maintenance of this exact correspondence may not seem of such supreme importance. While to the man of physical science any experience of the kind could be nothing but disconcerting in the highest degree, to the artist it may be, and in fact, on occasions, has been of incalculable value. If he has been reproached for mental aberration on the score of having seen and heard things not really existing, it is a reproach for which he has been amply repaid by the added vigour and power which he has thence derived.

It will be observed that in the passage quoted above it is stated that veridical hallucinations apparently never impair the rational life of the subject. The primary reference is to those hallucinations which subsequent investigation has proved to have conveyed true information to the percipient, as for example, with reference to the death of a friend. This criterion can, of course, only be applied when the hallucination has to do with some definite matter of fact, the truth or falsity of which can be afterwards established by independent means. Yet some hallucinations, like those of genius, though dealing not with matters of fact, but with principles of beauty, are nevertheless capable of verification in their own way. Their truth lies not in correspondence with some particular event in the material world, but in a higher correspondence with the eternal laws of beauty. And the proof of their possession of this quality is manifested in the

continued intensity of their appeal to the aesthetic faculties of men, and in the vigour of the response which they do not cease to evoke. In this sense Raphael's vision of the Sistine Madonna was a veridical hallucination. It was a revelation, the truth and force of which has been confirmed by the consentient verdict of mankind.

It has been necessary to prefix these remarks about the scope and character of hallucination in order to prevent misunderstanding when we apply the word to the voices and visions of the prophets. If we allow that the prophets heard spiritual voices, we may also be prepared to allow that the experiences were hallucinatory in character. Yet not for a moment do we intend to suggest that they were morbid. Psychologically, they were hallucinations in the sense that they were true sensations, externalized by the percipient, the originating cause of which lay within the mind of the prophet. He heard a voice speaking to him, to which there was no objectively corresponding reality in the material world. That which produced these sensations was a movement within. There is no possible reason why, as believers in the reality of Inspiration, we should demur to this account of the matter, if only we are careful to insist that the movement within the heart or mind of the prophet was not self-originated. It was an effect ; and the agent at work we believe to have been the Spirit of God. In this action it seems as though we were able to trace several stages or links ; the all-controlling influence of the Spirit upon the personality, the specific touch giving the impulse that translates itself into the mystical experience of sound or sight, the resulting activity of the prophet among his fellows. Acknowledging the pervasive influence of

the Spirit throughout every stage of the process we are prepared to give full credence to the prophet when he introduces his message with the declaration, 'Thus saith the Lord.'

If the experiences of the prophet in the hearing of voices belong to the class of hallucinations, can we claim further that there is evidence for their being veridical? The application of these terms to the facts of prophecy is objectionable, but it may be sanctioned for the moment on the ground that in this way we can draw attention to a parallel between the inspiration of revelation and the inspiration of genius. We have seen how the artistic hallucination obtains its verification. It is proved to have been true, because that which was produced under its influence is found to be in harmony with the deep-seated instinct for beauty in the heart of man. Something analogous has taken place with regard to the words of the prophets. We refer here not to their predictions, which in many cases certainly were verified by the event, but to their enunciation of moral principles. Take, for example, the declaration of the principle of national responsibility for national sins as it is set forth by Amos (chap. i). The principle is naturally stated by the prophet in a particular form with reference to certain specified nations and certain specified sins; but it is of universal validity. The solemn denunciations which express and reiterate it appear, as we have seen, to be derived from trance-heard voices, i.e. from 'hallucination'. But could we desire a better example of a 'veridical hallucination'? For that this principle is incontrovertibly true has long since been affirmed by the unanimous moral witness of mankind.



## CHAPTER VII

### PROPHETIC VISION IN AMOS AND ISAIAH

MUCH of what we have said with regard to the hearing of trance voices will be capable of application to the psychology of the prophetic vision. For the translation of the psychical impulse into terms of sight must naturally be closely parallel to its translation into those of sound. Psychical vision no less than psychical audition will be conditioned by the circumstances of the seer, who, as he hears the trance voice speak to him in his mother tongue, will also in vision see those objects or modifications of those objects with which he is familiar in his waking moments. The ecstatic vision, like the ecstatically-heard voice, is in itself no guarantee of the truth of a revelation. It is only the means by which something that purports to be a revelation is conveyed to the mind. It is perfectly possible that falsehood should be introduced into the mind by the same channel as that which brings truth. Lying visions are as much a fact to be accounted for as are true visions. From the point of view assumed in this inquiry we understand psychical vision to be a rare human capacity bestowed upon man by the Creator, like every other faculty, in order that it may be used in His service and to man's own benefit. Like every other faculty, it may be turned from its true purpose ; it may be abused and desecrated. From this danger not even the highest faculty is free. Reason itself, the candle

of the Lord within us, may be employed to light men to deeds of darkness. Rightly used, psychical vision discloses to man aspects of truth which otherwise, perhaps, he would not be competent to see; abused, it becomes the most dangerous and most disastrous means of his self-deception. Whether the evidence of the prophetic books themselves tallies with and confirms this view we shall now proceed to discuss.

The importance assigned in Holy Scripture to the power of vision is unmistakable. In connexion with the history of Samuel, we have already had occasion to notice how the word originally used to denote the prophet was the seer (חֹזֶה or רֹאֶה), i. e. clearly the man who sees in trance. Although this term gradually fell into disuse, the corresponding substantive (חֲזִיוֹן) recurs with the utmost frequency in the prophetic writings. To what they have seen in vision the prophets repeatedly appeal. Yet from this fact we must not draw any hasty inference. For precisely as the expression 'Thus saith the Lord' may have become more or less a set formula, so also it is possible that the terminology of vision may have acquired something of a conventional character. Without any trace of a wish to mislead his readers, the prophet may have used the language of vision as a convenient mode of composition, nor would his contemporaries have experienced any difficulty in distinguishing his meaning. Familiar with the prophet himself, and with the circumstances of his life, they would at once have divined whether he was relating to them a vision which he had really seen or merely using a form of allegory. That the latter is the true account to be given of the series of visions in the book of Zechariah is now the commonly accepted opinion among commentators. The set form,

the elaborate allegorical imagery, the precision of the details, the exactness of the parallelism between the different visions, all point in this direction. Yet while we readily grant so much, we must also insist that the literary form would never have arisen had there not originally been psychic experiences, supplying the model on which the later 'literary' visions were framed. The reasons for holding this opinion are to be gathered from a detailed examination of the narratives of visions in the books of the earlier prophets. Once again Amos, the head of the line of literary prophets, provides us with the most significant evidence on the point. Just as his written oracles seem to be but a short distance removed from trance-heard voices, so his visions read like a plain unvarnished account of what he had himself experienced in the prophetic trance. The grasshoppers stirring in the plain, the builder with the plumb-line in his hand, the basket of summer fruit, the majestic figure standing on the altar, these are pictures which might most naturally have presented themselves to the trance-held imagination of the gatherer of sycomore fruit. They do not bear the appearance of illustrations consciously selected and put together in order to attract the attention or lead the thoughts in a given direction. They are altogether too spontaneous and unforced to be classed as literary artifice. If we compare them with the visions of apocalyptic literature, their characteristics emerge the more clearly by the contrast.

The book of Isaiah opens with the words, 'The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.' The note of time indicates that the word vision here is used in an extended sense, signifying that power of prophetic

insight which was the mainspring of Isaiah's activity. But what justification was there for thus describing and characterizing his work? Is he to be classed among those who received their revelations through the medium of trance? Or was he merely adopting a traditional mode of speech when he represented the religious convictions of his own soul as having been revealed to him in vision? It is not an easy question to answer with any degree of precision. Professor Robertson Smith declines to make the attempt to discriminate between actual vision and literary workmanship in the prophet's description of his call. 'Nor can it,' he writes, 'be of importance to us to determine how far the description is conscious poetry and how far the pictures described passed without any effort of thought or volition before his inner eye. Even in the highest imaginings of poetical genius this question would be hard to answer, much less can we expect to be able to analyse the working of the prophet's soul in a supreme moment of converse with God.'<sup>1</sup> That this task of discrimination is difficult is certain; but it is not easy to agree with the opinion that it is unimportant. The utmost that can be said is that the truth of the revelation remains unaffected whatever may be the result of the analysis. But if we wish to understand something of the working of the Spirit in the matter of revelation, it is a question of the greatest interest whether so pre-eminent a prophet as Isaiah had or had not the visionary temperament.

In spite of the general heading prefixed to the book, there is throughout a remarkable absence of reference to particular visions. In this respect we cannot but be struck by the contrast exhibited between the longer

<sup>1</sup> *Prophets of Israel*, p. 219.

book and the much shorter writings of Amos, in which the narrative of visions bulks so large. Yet the one vision which Isaiah relates at length is of cardinal importance in his life. It was the overwhelming spiritual experience which marked him off from his fellow countrymen, a man set apart with a mission and a responsibility peculiar to himself. Much will turn upon the interpretation of this passage (chap. vi). Some commentators there have been who have found in it no more than a striking allegorical presentment of the prophet's heartfelt confidence in the reality of his divine mission, and of the tragic conviction that his preaching nevertheless would be to deaf ears and to hard hearts. According to this exegesis it is impossible to make use of the passage except as illustrating the religious and ethical principles whereby the prophet's conduct was determined, and we learn from it nothing as to the history of the origin of those convictions. They may have been the slow and gradual product of a life's experience, projected backwards by the prophet to the beginning of his career, and cast into this inimitably vivid and affecting form. In a question of this kind it is impossible to do more than weigh probabilities. Positive proof is, in the nature of things, unattainable. But surely probabilities point unmistakably one way. No one who has freed his mind from the prejudice against revelation through vision can read the passage without being impressed by the verisimilitude of the narrative. The notes of time and place have a precision not easily reconcilable with any view that casts suspicion upon the historicity of the incident. It was in the year that king Uzziah died, and there can be little doubt but that the prophet means us to understand that the scene was the temple. It is remarkable how



entirely consistent are all the details. Isaiah, worshipping in the temple, falls into a trance. The sights and sounds upon which the attention of his waking consciousness had been bent continue to affect him, but they are marvellously transfigured. In the place of the Holy of Holies is the lofty throne on which is seated the figure of the Lord in majesty, with the skirts of the royal robe filling the palace. No earthly priests are there, but their functions are being discharged by the mysterious seraphim, possibly personifications of the powers of nature. The prophet hears the song of the heavenly worship, sees the temple filled with the cloud of incense, and feels the threshold shake beneath his feet. Such is the scene in which the action takes place. As the vision proceeds, the prophet can no longer remain a mere spectator. His ardent, impulsive nature, fired with the enthusiasm of youth, prompts his answer to the divine summons. But at that very moment there springs up in him an overpowering sense of his own sinfulness, of his unfitness for the task, of his unworthiness of the privilege of the vision of God vouchsafed to him. Very significant is the touching of his lips with the live coal from the altar. Not only does it represent the purging of his sin, but it marks him out as the man who is to speak for God. Concerning the obligation thus laid upon him he has no misgivings, nor any illusions as to the paucity of the results which will ensue. At the very crisis of his spiritual exaltation he realizes that in its outward aspect his is to be a mission of continuous failure.

Surely this is a vision such as in all ages saints have been privileged to behold ; and none the less deserving to be recognized as a communication from heaven because we can trace in it the influences of the prophet's

early surroundings and of the outward religious ritual to which he had been accustomed. These are facts which clearly suggest the subjective character of the vision. Had the seer belonged to a different race and moved in a different environment, it may safely be presumed that the imagery would have been altogether otherwise. 'The prophetic visions, like all visions, were the productions of the prophetic mind. The mind did not see what was projected before it ; it projected the visions by its own operation'.<sup>1</sup> We need not hesitate to accept this description as true even of this supremely great vision ; and, further, we may believe this projection of the visionary image to have taken place strictly in accordance with the laws that govern the working of the human mind in this region. But we also believe that the whole process, natural in its mere mechanism, was supernatural in its initiation and in its issues. We postulate here, as we postulated in the case of the trance voices, an impulse from without, the source of which is the Divine Spirit. Nor must we fall into the mistake of supposing that the originating impulse and that alone was the work of the Spirit. For was it not this same Spirit that had made the prophet's mind an instrument fit to receive and to transmit the message. That being the case, however much subjectivity there was in the form which the vision assumed, it does not, therefore, become the mere product of human imagination and destitute accordingly of authority. To those who profess their belief in a Spirit who 'spake by the prophets', it is clothed with the dignity of a revelation.

If, then, we reject the notion that true visions are objective and false subjective, holding on the contrary

<sup>1</sup> A. B. Davidson, *Old Testament Prophecy*, p. 161.

that all alike are projected from within, it may be we shall be asked what is the criterion by which we are to distinguish between the two. To this question we shall answer, as before, that the differentiating characteristics are to be sought and found, not in the peculiar circumstances of the vision, but in the contents of the message thereby conveyed. Not that the recognition of this difference is within the power of man's own unaided reason and conscience. But as it is the function of the Spirit both to prepare the messenger and to give the message, so also is it His function to convince the world of its truth. How this divine action manifests itself in the world we shall consider later in connexion with the question of New Testament prophecy.

There are no other passages in the writings of Isaiah of which we can assert with a like measure of probability, approaching to moral certainty, that they are descriptions of actual mystical experiences. Though cast into this form it is at all events possible to explain them as the result of the practice of using this traditional and conventional mode of speech in the endeavour to convince an unwilling people of unpalatable truths. And yet it is only just to remember that the man who has once seen a vision is not unlikely to have a repetition of the experience. He must be reckoned among those who possess psychic capacities—the men whose mind-pictures or mind-voices may reach that pitch of intensity at which they are externalized. We may call it the point of hallucination, if we are careful to remember that in this sense the word hallucination conveys no stigma, and implies no false estimate of his visions on the part of the seer. He may see things before him as plainly as ever he did with his bodily

eyes; but the healthful visionary will know that what he thus sees belongs not to the material but to the spiritual world.

On the strength of the narrative contained in chapter vi we have come to the conclusion that Isaiah did in fact possess this power. Hence, when we come across passages in his writings which in themselves might leave us in doubt as to whether they are descriptions of genuine visions or allegories, we shall be readier to understand them in their plain meaning than we should be did we know nothing about their author's temperament. We will take, by way of example, the succession of oracles given in chapter xxi. Verses 1-10 of this chapter form one of the most obscure passages in the book, but are highly instructive, and, if the interpretation which we shall proceed to give be accepted, especially illustrative of the phenomena of the prophetic vision. Considerable difference of opinion exists as to the period to which the prophecy in question should be assigned. On the one hand, the reference to Elam and Media in verse 2 has induced many commentators to decide in favour of an exilic date, and to find in this passage a prediction of the fall of Babylon before the onslaught of Cyrus. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that the announcement of the capture of the city appears to excite in the heart of the seer feelings of sadness and depression, very unlike the exultation which he might be expected to exhibit at the prospect of the ruin of the oppressor. How fiercely that current of feeling ran in the hearts of the exiles we may judge from the language of Deutero-Isaiah. Moreover, the ideas and the phraseology are entirely consistent with the view that the prophecy comes from Isaiah's own hand. Nor upon this hypo-

thesis is it difficult to account for the contents of the prophecy. Babylon is a city that in the course of her history has endured many sieges, some of which are known to have fallen within the lifetime of the prophet. At that time Western Asia was suffering grievously under the iron oppression of Assyria, and it is probable that the embassy of Merodach-Baladan to Jerusalem (Isa. xxxix) was concerned with an attempt to construct a combination against the common oppressor. Although Isaiah himself earnestly endeavoured to dissuade the king, Hezekiah, from entertaining the policy of alliance with this heathen power, yet it is not unlikely that some arrangement had been made with a view to a joint rising. 'If,' writes Dr. Driver, 'some such understanding subsisted when the Assyrians entered upon the task of reducing the rebellious city to submission, the issue of the struggle would be awaited with eagerness in Judah; for their success would of course mean not only the failure of the combination against Assyria, but the prompt and condign punishment of those who were suspected of being implicated in it. . . . This success Isaiah finds it his duty to announce.'<sup>1</sup>

Accepting this view of the historical background of the passage, we pass on to examine it with respect to the light which it throws on the psychology of prophecy. We have reason to think that in these verses we may find a vivid picture of the experiences through which the seer passed, and of the feelings which dominated him in rapid succession and alternation. First comes a description of the mental disturbance and unsettlement which preceded the trance, the sense of impending catastrophe, the heavy pressure of foreboding which

<sup>1</sup> *Isaiah, his Life and Times*, p. 96.



weighed upon the prophet's spirit. This presentiment of evil is manifestly connected with the siege of Babylon that was even then in progress. So far his knowledge is derived from merely natural sources of information. All Jerusalem knew of the siege and was awaiting the result in great anxiety. That which comes specially into the prophet's mind is the poignant contrast between the careless feasting and the sudden call to arms. Thus verses 2-5 are introductory, describing in highly allusive and poetical language the critical position of the city, and the painful, tense suspense with which the prophet in Jerusalem expects news of the issue. Then comes the vision proper. The Lord bids him set a watchman on the tower. Though spoken of in the third person the watchman is without doubt the prophet himself; the mounting into the watch-tower symbolizes entrance into the state of trance. The entranced seer is bidden to gaze into the distance and watch for the sight of a long military train passing across the landscape. In his trance the sense of the long pressure of anxiety to which he has been subjected in his normal state repeats itself, so that to himself he seems to spend whole nights with strained attention. At last his patience is rewarded; the revelation so long expected comes. He sees a chariot with a couple of horsemen going at speed. They are the couriers commissioned to carry news of the victory of Assyria. And with his spiritual ear he hears the announcement, 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.' Finally the prophet, with his heart stirred to its depths by the grievous vision he has seen, turns to his countrymen with the words, 'O my threshed and winnowed one,' i.e. O Israel, who hast suffered so much from the ravages

of the Assyrian armies. However bitter the disappointment which it must cause, he cannot but tell them the truth which he has thus learnt from the Lord of Hosts.

This remarkable passage reads as though the vision actually synchronized with the events with which it is concerned. It appears to be not so much a case of prediction as of clairvoyance, the prophet seeing and hearing in trance that which was happening at a remote distance. And if this be so, it is an interesting survival in the prophet of those powers which had been mainly active in divination. Illustrative examples could be quoted from the Old Testament itself, to some of which we have already called attention (cf. p. 43). And in the lives of the saints many instances are recorded which exhibit their possession of a similar power. Hence it would seem that the prophet was using in the service of God and for the benefit of God's people a capacity the actuality of which is warranted by evidence drawn from other times and other countries.

The above explanation is based upon the simplest and most natural interpretation of the language of the passage. It is, however, fair to state that many commentators take the whole of this vision to be a piece of literary workmanship. It is urged that there is apparent exaggeration in the words which describe the seer's troubled condition of mind (*vv.* 3, 4), and that the presence of such exaggeration is inconsistent with the theory that a vision really occurred, the true explanation being rather that the prophet makes use of this rhetorical figure in order to arouse in the highest degree the interest of his readers. It is further pointed out how the actual announcement of the fall of

the great city is kept back till the last moment, when it falls with immense effect upon the mind kept waiting in suspense throughout the preceding verses. That this effect is produced, and by these means, is indisputable. But the question remains whether we are to account for it as an instance of excellent literary craftsmanship, or to make the supposition that the plain truth is in this case, as so often, more effective than the most ingenious art. There is the advantage of simplicity in supposing that the prophet is not forcing the note, but is giving a straightforward account of his experiences. And we are the more inclined to take this view of the matter when we observe how closely his account tallies with what is known of the phenomena of clairvoyance from other sources.

But even if the other hypothesis be preferred, and the form of the passage be explained as a conventional mode of lending emphasis to a prophetic announcement, it will still be evident that Isaiah, in his description of the seer and of his trance, is not trusting merely to his imagination, but is drawing from nature. However the passage be interpreted it will be none the less evidence of the occurrence of similar visions among the Hebrew seers in the past. Hence even those who do not find in these verses a first-hand record of psychic experiences must assign to them a high secondary value.<sup>1</sup>

This same chapter (xxi) contains the oracles of Duma, i.e. probably Edom, and of Arabia. The first is a cryptic utterance indeed. It is a noted crux of exegesis; but while its true explanation may be exceedingly uncertain, yet notwithstanding its obscurity it serves

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Giesebrecht, *Die Berufsbegabung der alttestamentlichen Propheten*, p. 58.

to illustrate in an interesting and somewhat exceptional manner the methods of prophecy. If we consider the passage with a mind free from prejudice against the recognition of the influence of trance or ecstasy upon prophecy, we shall probably conclude that behind it there lies some experience of an abnormal or supernormal character. 'The morning cometh and also the night ; if ye will inquire, inquire ye : turn ye, come.' It is not easy to think that the prophet deliberately and in his waking consciousness should have delivered any message in such obscure wise. What purpose could be served thereby ? The verses bear a fragmentary character like the broken pieces of a dream which the prophet has not been able fully to reconstruct in memory.

In the last verses of the chapter is foretold the downfall of the tribe of Kedar. It is a curious question whether these two oracles to foreigners were delivered by the prophet spontaneously or in answer to definite inquiries from the people of Edom and Dedan. Perhaps it is not possible to arrive at any very certain answer. Consultation of foreign oracles was nothing unusual, as is evident from the facts of Ahaziah's embassy to inquire of Baalzebub (2 Kings i. 2), and of Benhadad's application to Elisha (2 Kings viii. 8). That the reputation of the seer of Jerusalem should have penetrated to neighbouring countries is probable in any case ; but the probability will undoubtedly appear to be greater if we assume him to have been a visionary exhibiting at times the symptoms of trance. For it is these external signs which would have appealed most readily to the foreigner. Had he been only the great moral teacher, endowed indeed with supernatural powers of foresight and insight, but deficient in the characteristic

marks of the diviners of Western Asia, it is scarcely likely that the inhabitants of other lands would have been deeply impressed by rumours concerning him. Owing to the complete obscurity in which the origin of these oracles is involved, the point cannot be pressed; but so far as it goes it favours the view that the mechanism of trance and vision was an active factor in the inspiration of Isaiah. More than this we would not assert. It would, of course, be absurd to suggest that trance, vision, and audition were coterminous with Isaiah's inspiration, and that he never received a revelation except through these means. That is by no means our contention. Rather we believe much of his characteristic teaching to have been the fruit of his quiet thought and meditation upon the facts of life and history as they came to his knowledge by the ordinary channels of information. Conclusions thus developed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit were in the fullest sense inspired. Yet at the same time we may rightly credit him with the possession of a disposition more ardent and a temperament more sensitive to religious influences than the world has often seen before or since; and this highly-strung nature we believe to have passed at times through crises when the ordinary limits of sensational life were overpassed, and the thoughts of his heart shaped themselves into sights and sounds as vivid as material reality and charged to the full with spiritual import. Whether these occasions were few or many we have no means of judging. But, frequent or infrequent, they are not to be regarded as moments of weakness when the control of reason was in abeyance and the imagination gained an improper ascendancy. On the contrary, it was under these conditions that new vistas of truth opened out before



him, and the destinies of the nations disclosed themselves to him. He would not have been so great a prophet, perhaps he would not have been a prophet at all, had he not been endowed by the God who called him to that office and work with the capacity to see visions and to dream dreams.

## CHAPTER VIII

### PROPHETIC VISION IN JEREMIAH AND EZEKIEL

WHILE a close parallelism exists between the initiatory visions of Isaiah and Jeremiah, there are nevertheless peculiarities in the call of the later prophet worth considering from the psychological point of view. The various difficulties connected with the exegesis of these verses need not detain us, since we shall be occupied with the passage solely so far as it is the record of a great mental crisis in the life of the prophet. Hence the examination of problems concerned with the interpretation of the obscure historical allusions will lie outside our scope and may be dismissed without notice.

In the discussion of the bearing of the passage upon our subject the same main alternative awaits decision as presented itself in the case of Isaiah. Have we here a dramatic representation of the formation in the mind of Jeremiah of the great conviction that he had a personal mission to carry out, and an allegorical description of the painful struggles through which he passed before he could yield himself unreservedly to the divine leading, and make a complete surrender of himself to the divine call, whatever the cost in suffering and lifelong unhappiness might in the event prove to be? Or is it the record of a real incident in his spiritual life, when he heard these voices, made these replies, and saw these visions emblematic of the impending

troubles of his country? In answer it is worth noting how the effort after literary effect is even less apparent here than in the corresponding vision of Isaiah. Yet if the passage were (as has been suggested) deliberately constructed in order to represent in carefully selected outward symbols an inner and spiritual conflict, it would seem that some mark of the literary tool must have inevitably remained in evidence. The absence of any trace of the kind, and the consequent entire simplicity of the narrative, is an argument of considerable force for the reality of the vision here described. Perhaps also we shall feel that the tender and sensitive nature of Jeremiah may very likely have been liable to psychic experiences. Nor shall we be much influenced in the contrary direction by the fact that in his after life there came moments when he almost succumbed to the temptation to give up the unequal conflict. It is true there were times of extreme depression, when he cried, 'I will not make mention of Him, or speak any more in His name' (xx. 9). Basing their arguments on the occurrence of these expressions of despondency, some writers have contended that he would never have thus given way if he had ever actually beheld the visions of his first chapter. Accordingly they have understood that so-called vision to be an imaginary narrative made up of sentiments and convictions belonging in historical fact to the later years of the prophet's life, but transferred by him to the opening scene. In this contention there would be more force if the human heart were always controlled by a severe and inflexibly correct logic. Of course in fact it is not so; and be the conviction of vocation never so clear and definite, yet, as the experience of many a saint has shown, there come occasions when the tired

spirit flags under the strain. In view of this recognized fact it is unfair to bring forward Jeremiah's candid avowal of wavering resolution as though it were in contradiction with the historicity of his vision. The one is entirely compatible with the other.

The issue is simply and impartially stated by Professor Cheyne in the following sentences : ' One cannot be sure that we have the visions of the prophets exactly as they were experienced if they were written down a long time afterwards ; and the plays upon words which occur in Jeremiah's account of his own visions warn us not to build too much on the literal historical accuracy of the narrative. It will be pardonable if some reader should doubt whether Jeremiah meant us to believe that he really had any vision at all—whether he does not presume that his readers will take these so-called visions as pure literary fictions such as have been recognized in all great literary periods. . . . For my part I prefer to believe that one who is so candid as Jeremiah in his descriptions of himself really did experience a vision at this crisis of his inner life, like Isaiah before him ; but I lay no stress upon this because the opposite view is possible.' <sup>1</sup>

Assuming that we have here the account of a true vision, we proceed to ask what are the psychological features of interest that it presents, and how are they to be accounted for. Most clearly evident is the difference between the respective temperaments of Isaiah and Jeremiah, between the ardent and bold acceptance of the one and the timid hesitation of the other. From the biographical point of view this is interesting, but has not so close a bearing on our subject as the difference between the kinds of symbolism

<sup>1</sup> *Jeremiah, his Life and Times*, p. 8

employed in the two visions. The grand and simple majesty of the Isaianic conception of the divine king has been replaced in Jeremiah by imagery of a different order, into which enters an element even of quaintness. The play upon the words almond tree (שֶׁמֶר) and watching (שֹׁמֵר) is, as we have seen, considered by Dr. Cheyne to be a point difficult of reconciliation with the interpretation of the passage as a narrative of a real vision. This criticism raises a question of no little interest and importance. The objection appears to be based upon the supposition that a superficial artifice like a play upon words would not naturally find a place in so dignified an experience as a genuine vision. But is not this supposition due to a mistaken conception of what a vision really is? If it were actually a glimpse into an objective heaven there would be force in the objection; but as soon as we have admitted that the form of the vision is determined within the prophet's mind, that force is much weakened or even disappears altogether. If the vision be the projection into terms of sense, whether of sight or sound, of a truth revealed to the prophet, there is no reason why this projection should not exhibit childish and quaint characteristics. In fact the chances are that it will do so if there is any element of childishness and quaintness in the prophet's mind. Hence it is entirely conceivable that the prophet may in vision have heard spiritual voices speaking to him in sentences the point of which lay in some paronomasia. If the prophet in his waking consciousness was unaware of any incongruity between such tricks of speech and the solemn dignity of the truths which he had to communicate, there is no psychological reason why the vision should not have shaped itself on these lines. In vision he would be no



more exempt from the literary or artistic defects of his age than from its other limitations of knowledge. In fact the intrusion of these verbal ingenuities into the trance-heard voices of the prophets is remarkably consistent with that theory of prophetic vision which has commended itself on other grounds.

One further remark must be made concerning this play on words in Jeremiah's vision. It is a mechanical and superficial way of lending emphasis to a statement, and as such is more characteristic of early and immature stages of literary development than of later times. Hence the appearance of this literary blemish, if it deserves that name, excites less surprise in the visions of Amos than in that of Jeremiah. That the former should have made use of the practice is intelligible on the score of his early date ; that the latter should have retained it requires some different explanation. Possibly the reason is to be found in the remarkable persistence of tradition in religious phraseology, and Jeremiah's use of these tricks of speech arises from imitation of earlier prophets. Psychologically, imitation of this kind might be quite as operative in vision as in conscious literary production. As the visible symbols of vision are drawn from what the seer has seen in his waking state, so the words that he hears may be derived from the memory of what he has read. In this way the written records of his predecessors may have strongly influenced the visionary experience of Jeremiah. On the other hand, the method of his symbolism begins to diverge from theirs, and to take on more of the character of allegory, a more particularized meaning being attached to the separate details. In later prophets this process was carried still further.

In psychological interest the book of Ezekiel does

not come behind those of his predecessors, however much we may feel that the fountain of inspiration is no longer flowing so freely as it did in the former days. It is a strange region of mystery into which we are lifted by the record of his initiatory vision. It seems a new departure without precedent in the earlier literature. For the first time we read the narrative of a professed vision which calls up no clear picture in imagination. That no mind-picture can be formed in correspondence with the words of the description appears to be proved by the impossibility of a pictorial representation. Wonderfully impressive in its own way as is the famous picture by Raphael in the Pitti Gallery, it cannot properly be described as a transcript into visible symbols of the prophet. And where Raphael failed it may fairly be concluded that success was unattainable. What reason, then, can we assign for this unpictorial quality in the vision? The simplest explanation would seem to be that as a matter of fact no scene can have been before the spiritual eye of Ezekiel, as we believe scenes to have been before the spiritual eyes of earlier prophets. Will it, therefore, be right to conclude that whatever may have been the case with Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel at all events was employing a literary artifice when he adopted the form of vision for the conveyance of his teaching? It might seem a plausible assumption, but there are weighty considerations on the other side, the force of which must not be overlooked. The case cannot be rightly judged unless it be remembered that all visions are not of the same type. In addition to those which appeal primarily to the sense of sight, or to the combined senses of sight and sound, there are others to which the great visionary, S. Theresa, has given the name of intellectual visions. The distinction

which she draws, and which has the merit of being founded upon her own first-hand experience, is deserving of careful attention. 'There are,' she writes, 'persons of whom I have known several with a spirit so weak and an imagination so strong that they imagine themselves to have seen clearly that which they have only thought about ; but if they had had any true visions they would have no difficulty in recognizing that these are only chimerical.' <sup>1</sup> In the first place, then, true visions must be distinguished from false ones, and this can be done by means of certain definite and characteristic marks. For example, false visions produce less effect than would a painting of some mystery of religion ; they disappear as rapidly and as readily as do dreams. Whereas in real visions the soul is stirred to its depths by some entirely unexpected and unthought of sight, after which follows a sensation of great calm and peace, coupled with an absolute assurance of the impossibility of self-deception in the matter. In the second place, true visions may again be distributed into two classes. There are 'representative' visions in which objects are presented to sight, and there are other visions in which though nothing is seen yet truth is conveyed to the soul and is recognized as coming from God. 'It happens sometimes when one is in prayer . . . that our Saviour causes us to enter suddenly into a trance in which he discloses to the soul great secrets, which she seems to see in Him though it is not a vision of His holy humanity. But though I use the term "see" the soul really sees nothing, and this vision is not one of those which I have called representative. It is an intellectual vision which makes known to the soul in what way all things are seen in God, and how they are in Him. Now this

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres Complètes*, Paris, 1840, i. p. 692.

vision is most beneficial because, though it pass in a moment, it remains deeply impressed upon the soul.' <sup>1</sup> One feels in reading this passage that S. Theresa is attempting to express an idea for which it is exceedingly difficult to find appropriate words. A mystical experience so different from the ordinary modes of the apprehension of truth might easily elude definition. But it is at the least clear that by an intellectual vision she implies not a mere vague feeling of contact with ultimate reality, but a real grasp of some religious truth 'seen in God', i.e. intuitively and immediately apprehended. <sup>2</sup>

With the help of this distinction derived from S. Theresa the difficulties in which the interpretation of Ezekiel's vision is involved are in some measure lightened. For there is nothing incredible in the supposition that the prophet was the recipient of an intellectual vision in the special sense of the word, and that the obscurities of the passage arise from his attempt to express in pictorial language truths too subtle for representation in that medium. He had, in S. Theresa's language, seen things in God; he had caught a vision of the divine power guiding and controlling all natural forces, and of an omniscient providence advancing straight to its predetermined goal. His soul had been overwhelmed by a sense of the ineffable majesty of God, enveloped in the light which no man can approach unto. Can we wonder that no symbols were capable of conveying truths of this transcendental nature, and that consequently to the

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres Complètes*, Paris, 1840, i. p. 696.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. E. B. Leroy: 'Interprétation psychologique des visions intellectuelles chez les mystiques chrétiens,' *Revue de l'histoire des Religions*, 1907.

literalist the prophet's vision appears nothing but a medley of inconsistencies and impossibilities?

Dr. Redpath, in his recent commentary, offers a different explanation of the difficulty. 'In considering this and other visions of the prophet it is well to remember that we have in them an attempt to describe in human language with all its imperfections what to the prophet were visions of the Divine. That the language he used conveyed to him the impressions that were formed on his mind by the visions seems quite clear, for the language describing them is harmonious with itself, as we can see by a comparison in detail of the description here (chap. i) with that of chapter x. But we have not seen the visions, and therefore it is not to be wondered at if the impressions formed upon our minds by the language the prophet uses fail of definite clearness and only give us vague ideas of the incomprehensible majesty and glory of God.'<sup>1</sup> According to this interpretation Ezekiel had seen something clear and definite in his vision, though he is unable to reproduce the effect in our minds, and this inability is attributed to the deficiencies of human language when concerned with such high themes. Considering the surprising skill in drawing verbal pictures which Ezekiel displays on other occasions, it is more natural to explain the vagueness and obscurity of the passage as due to some peculiarity in the nature of the visionary experience.

Following the sound canon of criticism that words are to be taken in their plain natural sense unless there is some definite and good reason to the contrary, we cannot doubt but that Ezekiel was peculiarly subject to trances. Throughout his book there are frequent references to incidents which do not easily fall in with

<sup>1</sup> H. A. Redpath, *Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p. 1.



any other interpretation. A notable example is the account which he gives in chapters viii–xi of a visit paid in spirit to Jerusalem, and of all that he there saw. The prophet is careful to note the precise date of the occurrence, mentioning the very day of the month, and calls attention to the circumstance that he was in his own house with some of his fellow-countrymen before him (viii. 1). At that moment the hand of the Lord fell upon him. The expression used seems to indicate a sudden and wholly unexpected visitation. Probably he passed into a condition of catalepsy with the suddenness characteristically symptomatic of that condition. When he recovered his senses he was able to tell his companions what he in spirit had seen in Jerusalem (xi. 25). Like the vision of Isaiah (chap. xxi), which we have already discussed at some length, it is a case of clairvoyance. But in the present instance there is less ambiguity. To maintain that Ezekiel sought to give emphasis to his denunciation of the idolatrous practices at Jerusalem by throwing his invective into the form of a vision would be a gratuitous supposition unsupported by any evidence in the text as it stands. Doubtless his natural knowledge of the probable course of events at Jerusalem might have enabled him to form a correct conjecture of what a visitor to the city would see ; and this conjecture might have translated itself into actual pictures of the scene when he was in a condition of trance. On the other hand, he certainly imagined himself to have been present in spirit in Jerusalem ; and when we remember how well attested is the power of perception of things at a distance (however it is to be explained), we shall not be concerned to question that he did actually see the things which he so vividly described.

For if in some cases Ezekiel's visions belonged to the so-called intellectual type, there were evidently other occasions on which the visual impressions must have been extraordinarily sharp and distinct. Even more significant than the instance already noticed (although that is sufficiently marked) is the famous vision of the dry bones in the open valley (chap. xxxvii). Certainly when Ezekiel had a 'representative' vision he did not lack the literary skill to produce the corresponding effect upon the minds of his readers. It would be difficult to point to any passage in the Old Testament in which the quality of vividness of description is displayed to greater advantage. The reader feels himself to be standing at the prophet's side and to be seeing through the prophet's eyes. The scene passes before him. The dry bones come together with a harsh sound, the sinews and flesh are formed upon them ; the breath enters into them, and the men stand upon their feet, an exceeding great army. The man who gave us this picture lacked neither distinctness of imagination nor dexterity in word-painting. If at other times his descriptions are such as to leave only a blurred image on the mind, it can only be because he is trying to express in symbols truths which no combination of line and colour, even in imagination, can adequately represent.

It is by no means easy to determine what psychological account should be given of the vision of the restored temple (chaps. xl ff.). Had the description occurred in some book of whose author we knew nothing the decision would almost certainly have been against the reality of the visions. But the case is not so simple when we take into account the strongly psychic disposition of the author. Of all the greater prophets

he is the one to whom visions came most frequently, and to whom trance in its various forms was a most familiar experience. This is a material fact which cannot possibly be ignored in the endeavour to determine between the real or fictitious character of the visions. Against the supposition of reality it is fair to point out that the exact figures of measurement, the mass of prosaic detail, the elaborate directions as to ritual, have all the appearance of being the fruit of long conscious meditation. They lack the spontaneity which we are accustomed to look for in the impressions received through visions. Giesebrecht has made the interesting conjecture that we have here an example of the well-known psychic phenomenon of auto-suggestion.<sup>1</sup> The prophet may have employed himself in working out at length the plan of a restored temple, and thereafter falling into a trance may have seen in vision the building which he had already constructed in imagination. In this way perhaps we may reconcile the prophet's assertion that he is relating a vision with the presence of so much precision of detail and measurement. For in presenting the record of his vision he would naturally avail himself of the calculations that he had previously elaborated. The result would be the strange and somewhat bizarre combination that lies before us in his text.

The study of Ezekiel's visions serves to bring out the fact that he is distinguished from his predecessors by some marked psychological peculiarities. It would not be going too far to say that there is some measure of deterioration. The psychic states into which he was accustomed to fall appear to be due more to natural causes and to temperament than to that

<sup>1</sup> *Die Berufsbegabung der alttestamentlichen Propheten*, p. 62.

tension of the religious spirit which produced them in Isaiah and Jeremiah. His case is indeed a convincing disproof of the fallacy that the degree of inspiration varies in proportion with the excitation of the mind and the lapse of the normal consciousness. None of the prophets fell so frequently into trances as did Ezekiel. Yet manifestly his inspiration cannot be estimated as high as that of his great predecessors, Isaiah and Jeremiah, or of his successor, Deutero-Isaiah.

Connected with this part of our subject there is a further circumstance which merits attention. It is remarkable that the prophets seem to have seen their visions, or at any rate their most important visions, at the opening of their prophetic careers. Was the reason purely teleological? Did the vision come then in order that the prophet might thereby be established in the conviction of his mission? Or were there any other contributory causes or conditions which may deserve to be noticed? It may be observed in passing how exceedingly doubtful it is whether any vision in itself can produce that abiding sense of conviction. The visionary himself is even better aware than other people how great are the possibilities of self-deception, and how difficult it is to be sure that no element of illusion has entered into the mystical experiences of his soul. If any doubt at any time assailed the prophet with regard to his inspiration and his right to speak in the name of the Lord, it would undoubtedly take the form of a suggested imputation on the divine origin of the visions which he had seen. He could not have banished his hesitations merely by recalling the fact of his initiatory vision, because he would know well enough that visions were not always true. Fully admitting the fact that the first vision was the cause which induced

the young prophet to come forward, we cannot forthwith assert that no other explanation need be looked for why the vision should have come at that time. Possibly one reason for the fact may be found in the proneness of adolescence to experiences of the kind. 'Your young men shall see visions,' writes the prophet Joel, and perhaps even at that time it was recognized that this particular faculty was appropriate to youth. Whatever the cause may be—and it is possibly to be sought in the mysterious influence of the body upon the soul—it is certainly true that the years between childhood and manhood are the likeliest season for the occurrence of a spiritual crisis. There seems something strangely incongruous in the attempt to provide statistics of the movements of the soul, and to represent the comparative frequency of religious conversions at different ages by means of a chart and a curve. Yet when every allowance has been made for the necessary limitations of the method, it will still be felt that the results obtained by Professor Starbuck, and tabulated by him in his *Psychology of Religion*, deserve careful attention. The information there collected shows the great probability that if a spiritual crisis is to occur at all in life it will occur in the time of youth. Now human nature, we may be sure, alters very little in essentials, notwithstanding the lapse of centuries. What happens in the life of the soul to-day was doubtless happening under similar circumstances a thousand years before the Christian era. And that there is considerable similarity between the crisis of conversion in the life of the ordinary man and the crisis of his call in the life of the prophet is evident. The analogy is much more than superficial. 'To be converted, to receive grace, . . . to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote



the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided and consciously wrong, inferior, and unhappy becomes consciously right, superior, and happy in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious truth.' <sup>1</sup> Such is Professor James's definition of conversion, and it remains for us to ask how far such a description is appropriate to the 'call' of the prophet. The definition, as given, is expressed entirely in terms of the effect produced upon the soul of the converted person, no allusion being made to the source of that conversion. Yet to us it is important to notice that both in the case of the prophet's call and in that of conversion it is the same Spirit of God at work, who will, as we believe, follow the same line of working. It is true that in Scripture we hear nothing of the previous spiritual troubles through which the young prophet passed before he became convinced of his mission; but it would be against all spiritual analogy to imagine that this painful antecedent stage was absent. We may feel reasonably certain that the vision which summoned Amos to his task as a preacher, Isaiah to his life of protest against the sins of his people, and Jeremiah to his prolonged martyrdom were the concluding scenes in a spiritual conflict, when finally indecision was transformed into resolution, and doubt into certainty. That the crisis should be accompanied with a measure of psychic disturbance manifesting itself in the seeing of visions and the hearing of voices is no more than we might anticipate. Similar experiences, though on a lower plane, at the moment of conversion have in innumerable instances exercised a profound influence upon the subsequent life. So it was with the call of the prophets. It was to them the most memorable moment in their

<sup>1</sup> *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 189.

lives. Yet the true foundation of their steadfast loyalty and of their invincible confidence in the justice of their cause and the truth of their message lay not so much in the memory of an isolated incident, however wonderful, as in the continuous sense of communion with the God whom they served.

An analogy has been thought to exist between the life of the individual prophet and the general course of prophecy. As visions are more in place at the beginning of a prophet's career, so (it is said) revelation by means of vision after serving a useful purpose at the beginning of prophecy gradually passed away and a different form of inspiration took its place. The theory is based upon the assumption that vision is characteristic of a preliminary stage of spiritual development which is eventually outgrown. There is an implied disparagement of this mode of realizing the truth in comparison with other modes in which the normal consciousness takes a more active part. Yet if we refuse our assent to the validity of that prejudice against mysticism, which after all prevails only in the West, and can claim no universal consensus in its favour, there remains no ground for attaching this stigma to mystical vision. At any rate, it is a fact of history that at the periods of great spiritual advance these psychic phenomena of vision and audition have repeatedly manifested themselves. It was so eminently at the supreme moment when the Very Truth became flesh and dwelt among us. The advent of Christianity was attended by an outburst of spiritual power displaying itself in the renewed frequency of vision and other cognate spiritual activities. The New Testament contains many references to facts coming under this category. Nor is there any reason to think that in this

respect the apostolic age was essentially different from later periods. So far from that having been the case, it appears that the critical movements of Church history, when lost ground has been recovered and new conquests attempted, have been initiated by men who not only in their courage and devotion, but also in their mystical capacities, have resembled the prophets of old.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FALSE PROPHECY

IN some cases the disease of an organ has led to the discovery of its true function in the economy of the human body. What might have escaped observation in health forces itself upon the attention in the distress of sickness. Nor is it otherwise in the progress of knowledge with regard to the problems of mental and spiritual life. When the normal balance of the mind is disturbed, it is possible that certain facts may make themselves apparent, which the smooth working of the organism under healthy conditions has hitherto concealed. In the study of the psychology of religion the opportunities of observation provided by the aberrations of the human spirit are by no means to be neglected. On the other hand it is a palpable error to suppose that religion discloses its essential and primary characteristics in the pitiable excesses of the neurotic and hysterical temperament. Unfortunately, some recent writers have expressed themselves in such a way as to suggest that the most instructive examples, or human documents, as they have been appositely called, are just those which exhibit a dangerous leaning towards the abnormal and the morbid. But cases of this kind have, as a matter of fact, only a secondary importance. Nature, whether on the physical or spiritual plane, can be adequately known and appreciated only when seen at work in the fullness of healthful activity. The most that disease can do for the investi-

gator is to render the factors of health more apparent by contrast. Hence, if we now turn to the consideration of morbid elements in the religious life of Israel, it will be with the expectation not of discovering a pathological explanation of spiritual phenomena, but of adding something to our knowledge of the conditions on which the vigour and growth of the spiritual life of the nation ultimately depended.

The prophet, if true to his calling, was the trustee of those powers which make for progress. It was his privilege and his duty to press forward himself, and to carry his countrymen along with him. But in this world of mixed good and evil the possibilities of progress and development seem always to be in equilibrium with the risks of degeneration and decay. From the action of this law of deterioration prophecy was not exempt. The very endowments which should have served as a means of conferring great benefits were capable of being turned in an opposite direction, and of being made the instruments of a fatal and blighting influence.

False prophecy is a convenient term, but in making use of it it is well to remember that its range of meaning is wide, and that it may be applied in different senses. The contest on Mount Carmel, which ended in the victory of Elijah, was a struggle between true and false prophecy. On the one hand was the solitary champion of the religion of Jehovah; on the other the four hundred and fifty representatives of a different faith and cult, introduced by a foreign queen and deriving its influence from her patronage. Their wild gestures, their self-inflicted injuries, their endlessly repeated incantations, threw into strong relief the moral dignity and simplicity of their opponent. Whatever



may have been the case in earlier centuries, there could be no difficulty now in seeing the difference between prophecy as it was in the service of Jehovah and in the service of Baal, the true prophecy and the false.

Another scene falling within the limits of the same reign, and likewise described with considerable minuteness of detail, reveals the existence of a different kind of false prophecy. As Elijah had stood alone against the prophets of Baal, so Micaiah, the son of Imlah, confronted the band of prophets who with suspicious unanimity encouraged the King of Israel in his expedition against Ramoth-gilead. What account are we to give of these prophets? They were evidently in close connexion with the court, deriving their maintenance from the king, and therefore naturally inclined to express a favourable opinion of plans on which he had set his heart. But to what cult were they attached? Are they to be considered as successors of those prophets of Baal whom Elijah had slain at the brook Kishon? Or were they in some sort prophets of Jehovah? The evidence of the narrative points to the second of these alternatives. The prophets themselves profess to speak in the name of Jehovah. 'Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for Jehovah shall deliver it into the hand of the king' (1 Kings xxii. 12). The only reason for supposing the contrary is the form of the question put by Jehoshaphat, 'Is there not here besides a prophet of Jehovah?' But this interpretation seems to be due to a misunderstanding. The King of Judah had requested an appeal to the word of Jehovah, but was dissatisfied with the pronouncement of the prophets summoned in answer to his request. 'Is there not,' he says, 'yet another prophet of Jehovah besides those

who have spoken ? ' Presumably he knows of the existence of Micaiah, though he avoids any reference to him by name ; and thus indicates his desire to hear him indirectly. Between the words so understood and the supposition that the four hundred prophets claimed to be, and were generally acknowledged as, prophets of Jehovah there is no inconsistency.

It is probable that the fundamental difference between the four hundred and Micaiah lay not in the fact that they worshipped Baal and he Jehovah, but that they were ready to tolerate the foreign cult introduced by Jezebel alongside of the national worship. Whereas Micaiah, like Elijah, would have none of such a compromise. If this were the case, it would explain why the queen, who directed the full force of her vindictiveness against Elijah and those like-minded with him, had no quarrel with the pliant prophets of her husband. Presumably they were the allies rather than the rivals of her own prophets of Baal. With this interpretation would tally the words of Elisha to Jehoram. ' What have I to do with thee ? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother ' (2 Kings iii. 13). The prophets of Ahab and of Jezebel, it is probable, belonged to different institutions, but lived on friendly terms with one another. Giving due weight to these considerations, we can hardly doubt that Ahab's prophets were, nominally at all events, adherents of the national religion. Yet, as the issue showed, they were false prophets, deluded themselves and leading others to their ruin. We shall return to the consideration of Micaiah's apologue when we come to inquire into the source of the delusions to which the false prophets were subject.

In Judah no less than in Israel the false prophet

was a danger to the State and to religion, giving ruinously wrong advice at critical moments of the national fortunes, and offering irreconcilable opposition to the higher teaching of the true spokesmen of the will of God. That this opposition was keenly felt and as keenly resented is abundantly clear from the stern denunciations of the false prophet which appear in the extant prophetic writings. Micah speaks with characteristic severity. 'Thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that make my people to err, that bite with their teeth and cry, Peace; and whoso putteth not into their mouths they even prepare war against him. Therefore it shall be night unto you that ye shall have no vision, and it shall be dark unto you that ye shall not divine' (Micah iii. 5). Isaiah speaks of the common degradation of priest and prophet: 'They err in vision, they stumble in judgement' (Isaiah xxviii. 7). By far the fullest and most circumstantial account of the false prophet is to be found in the pages of Jeremiah. More than once is the cry repeated. 'The prophets prophesy falsely' (Jer. v. 31, xiv. 14, xxiii. 32, xxix. 9). The encounter between Jeremiah and the false prophet Hananiah is described at some length (chap. xxviii). Similar denunciations reappear in the book of Ezekiel.

True and false prophecy followed diverging lines, and as the national fortunes declined and disasters grew more imminent the opposition between the two became increasingly bitter. It has been questioned whether all the right was on one side and all the wrong on the other. In view of the fact that all our information about so-called false prophecy is derived from the *ex parte* statements of its adversaries, some modern commentators have endeavoured to set up a defence

for these condemned religious leaders, or at least to find excuses for them. Thus it has been pointed out that those whom we revere as the true prophets were in fact the innovators. They were the men whose peculiar mission it was to promote the development of religion by introducing new ideas into the obsolete and outgrown teaching of the past. This task they could not accomplish without arousing the opposition of those who instinctively chose rather to maintain the old than to welcome the new. Are we then to believe that the false prophets whose condemnation is couched in terms of such severity were guilty of no greater fault than a disinclination to follow where others led? Was it only that they exhibited a tendency to hang back when the fitting opportunity for a forward movement had arrived? That there is an element of truth in this account of the matter may be frankly admitted. When it assigns to the false prophet the position of an obstructionist, it is stating a pertinent fact. It is, indeed, obvious that the prophets whom Micah and his successors denounced as false must have been, in virtue of the prestige attaching to their office, the greatest of all hindrances to the introduction of higher religious conceptions. Yet if we attach reasonable weight to the positive and explicit charges brought against them we shall find it difficult to resist the conviction that their incapacity for appreciating the value of the new teaching and their embittered opposition to it was due to some more serious moral defect than a mere dullness of spiritual apprehension. The evidence points to the conclusion that false prophecy originated in a moral condition which fully merited the severe censure which it in fact received. Nor is there anything unlikely in the supposition of grievous moral degeneracy among

the prophets. They were exposed to peculiar temptations which might well prove too strong for any but the most steadfast and loyal spirits among them.

False prophecy was the more insidious and the more dangerous because it was not from the outset a system and an institution diametrically opposed to true prophecy, but came imperceptibly into being by a process of corruption of high endowments. What we have to imagine is the gradual deterioration of one originally gifted with the capacity for prophecy, the slackening of his moral fibre, the increasing loss of clearness of moral vision, the invasion of his conscience by a spirit of self-deception, and as an inevitable consequence the adulteration of his message with base elements. When this degenerative process had once set in it was impossible to tell to what lengths the disease might run. The prophet who tampered with the truth had committed himself to a downward course leading eventually to the lowest depths of hypocrisy and trickery. But, in the earlier stages at all events, it is probable that delusions played a larger part than conscious fraud. It is interesting to observe how the reproach with which the truly inspired prophet meets his opponents is not always that they are deliberately inventing or falsifying a communication from above. Not infrequently he accuses them rather of being themselves deceived. Thus in the passage describing the encounter between Micaiah and the false prophets his contention is that they have all been the victims of a lying spirit acting under the permission of Jehovah. He brings forward no accusation of any conscious plot on their part to deceive the king. In some sort he certifies their good faith in the matter. The unanimity of their encouragement of the king's project is represented as



having its source in the spiritual world, not merely in their desire to please their master. Their blunder is the first link in the chain of events which ends in the death of the king on the field of battle. His own sins were its originating cause, and it is part of his punishment. Doubtless they had thrown in their lot with the court party, thereby proving themselves unworthy guardians of the faith which by their calling they were pledged to defend. It was, therefore, justly appropriate that they should be the instruments by which the final disaster was brought about. The genuine confidence with which they proffered their advice rendered it the more effective for the accomplishment of the divine purpose.

To us the question presents itself, How was it that the false prophets became subject to delusions that involved both themselves and their dupes in a common ruin? The problem is not explicitly handled by the contemporary writers. The immediate need of the time was to counteract the injurious effects of false prophecy rather than to discuss the theory of its origin. Yet the descriptive allusions and references which we find here and there in the extant prophetic books throw a good deal of light on the matter, and enable us in some measure to analyse the various sources of the evil.

In the first place the false prophet deceived himself. He was partly responsible for his own delusions, going his own way instead of submitting to the divine guidance. He 'prophesied out of his own heart', and 'followed his own spirit' (Ezek. xiii. 2, 3). One of the salient characteristics of false prophecy was evidently its tendency to deliver a message in accordance with the wishes of the multitude. Whether at

the court of Ahab or at Jerusalem during the last desperate years preceding the destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, the false prophet prophesied victory and deliverance. His utterances took on the flavour which suited the palate of his audience. In fact the desire to be popular, or perhaps rather the fear of incurring odium, was the instigating cause of his first deviation from the straight path. Conceivably he had begun by realizing in his heart the absolute need of national repentance and reformation as a condition of escape from the approaching national catastrophe. He, too, had had his visions of a terrible day of the Lord, a day of darkness and of punishment. But how easy it must have been for one who lacked courage or was deficient in a sense of the obligations of his calling to soften the asperities of his preaching and lighten the shadows in his picture of the future. The point to be emphasized is that precisely because of his natural aptitude for prophecy he was peculiarly exposed to the force of this temptation. It was one of the defects of his qualities. Endowed with a more than usually keen consciousness of that which was passing in the minds of others, he could not but be intensely aware whether the impression which he was producing was favourable or the reverse. And this knowledge tended to react upon his words and actions. The psychic power which, rightly used, would have made him a heart-searching preacher, speaking with a full knowledge of the innermost feelings of his listeners, was the snare which entrapped its possessor. He knew what was in their hearts, but he used his knowledge to curry favour with them, rather than to administer the apt admonishment and rebuke.

If we imagine the false prophet to have thus come

into existence by the misuse of his faculties, we cannot fail to be struck by the curious parallel afforded by the history of the spiritualist movement during the last century. It is an undeniable fact that many so-called mediums, possessing originally some genuine endowment of psychic power, were subsequently convicted of the grossest fraud. And it appears that in most cases the predisposing motive was less the desire for pecuniary gain than the itch for notoriety and the admiration of their circle. The false prophet may not unnaturally have followed the same course of deterioration, influenced by similar motives, and passing through progressive stages of spiritual blindness and paralysis into a condition of total inability to distinguish truth from falsehood. This is the last and worst state when unconscious self-deceit and conscious deception of others interpenetrate one another so completely as to baffle all analysis.

In the second place the false prophet was deceived and misled by the people whom he addressed. Although unquestionably self-deception was the principal cause of his fall, yet responsibility rested also in some measure on the shoulders of those who followed him. He would never have deceived himself so readily had they not been willing and anxious to accept as true the falsehood offered them in the name of prophecy. This complicity of guilt is expressly declared by Ezekiel in a way which brings out some points of special interest. His testimony is the more important because he is the preacher of individual responsibility who repeatedly insists on the impartiality of the divine justice in meting out reward and punishment to individual desert. Yet it is he who reminded his hearers that disloyalty to the truth on the part of the inquirers was one of

the determining conditions of the prevalence of false prophecy. When the event had shown that the supposed prophet had given utterance to a false prediction or had tendered advice based on some utterly mistaken prevision of the future, his victims were not at liberty to repudiate all responsibility in the matter and to pose as deserving only of pity. There was a principle to be remembered. 'Every man of the house of Israel that taketh his idols into his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the Lord will answer him therein according to the multitude of his idols. . . . And they shall bear their iniquity: the iniquity of the prophet shall be even as the iniquity of him that seeketh unto him' (Ezek. xiv. 4, 10). There could be no more emphatic assertion of a joint responsibility. The vitiated atmosphere produced by the tainted religious life of the people as a whole must be held partly accountable for the individual failure of the prophet. He may not hope to escape the penalty which his fault has deserved, but punishment will also fall on the partners of his guilt.

When we remember that the false prophet resembled his more faithful brother in the possession of a psychic temperament specially liable to be swayed by the thoughts, feelings, and convictions of others, we can readily understand how, having lost his hold upon the divine guidance by concessions to desire for popularity or to cowardly fear for his own personal safety, he may have quickly drifted into becoming the mere mouthpiece of the prevailing mood of his listeners. Consider, by way of example, the significant instance of [Hananiah's promise of a speedy return from the exile (Jer. xxviii). Had he not been personally

convinced of the reality of his own supposed revelation he would never have committed himself to the statement that the fulfilment of his prediction would follow before two years were past. Hence there is every reason to suppose that his emphatic 'Thus saith the Lord' was not a deliberate falsehood, but the outcome of some psychic experience, some vision or trance which he interpreted to be a message from God. That it was nothing but the product of his own perverted imagination was subsequently established by the stern verdict of history. The special form which the perversion assumed we may reasonably suppose to have been determined by the fervid hopes of eventual escape not yet extinguished in the hearts of the people of Jerusalem. It is well known how strong is the combined influence of many minds concentrated in a given direction upon some impressionable person. To this influence, of course unconsciously exerted, Hananiah succumbed. The source of his psychic experience was not the spirit of God, but only the spirit of the people of Jerusalem. He was the dupe of the current temper of those whom he professed to guide. It was the crude superstition in their hearts, the unethical belief that the presence of the temple of Jehovah in their midst was in itself a pledge of prompt restoration which controlled the working of the false prophet's mind. The true prophet, on the other hand, was supported by a power which, without removing him beyond the range of these influences, rendered him immune from their insidious action. Never was this difference between true and false prophet more clearly manifested than in the person of Jeremiah himself. Here was one naturally sensitive and even timid beyond the average, yet in the strength of his devotion to duty and in



obedience to his profound sense of the obligations of his position able to take his stand alone and to sustain without yielding an inch the pressure of an opposing multitude. How much of suffering, mental and spiritual, his isolation cost him every page of his book abundantly testifies. It was a trial belonging essentially to the prophetic vocation and felt with peculiar keenness by the prophetic temperament. That the burden should have proved too heavy for the endurance of many is less surprising than that the few faithful ones should have endured to the end. In the exercise of the prophetic gifts the descent towards falsity and hypocrisy was fatally easy. All the more honour to those who never flinched from the pain which it cost them to speak, but delivered the truth as they received it, honestly, without reserve or qualification.

In the third place the false prophet was deceived by Jehovah. Such is the startling statement, for which Ezekiel again is responsible. The explanation that the false prophet partly deceived himself and partly was deceived by others is true as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. There is a third originating cause of perverted and misleading prophecy, a cause lying still further back in the divine will itself. The Lord uses the false prophet as an instrument to effect His purpose of punishment on the people who have been faithless to His covenant. It is evident that the expression is a striking example of that mode of thought which attributes events directly to the divine initiative, omitting all mention of secondary causes as being of trivial importance in comparison. How man's instinctive belief in the ultimate reality of human responsibility is to be reconciled with this view of the matter is the familiar and nevertheless insoluble

problem to which S. Paul refers in connexion with the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Although the phrase, 'The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart' (Exod. ix. 12, &c.) suggests that no choice of alternatives was open to the King of Egypt, yet the whole tenor of the narrative forbids us to think that the writer's intention was to find any excuse for his tyrannical action in the impossibility of resisting the divine decrees. The apparent contradiction is left unexplained. So it is with the phrase, 'And if the prophet be deceived and speaketh a word, I the Lord have deceived that prophet' (Ezek. xiv. 9). It is the assertion of a truth which is felt to be consistent with the guilt of the prophet so deceived. For just punishment can only be inflicted where there is guilt, and punishment in this case is destined to follow without fail. 'And I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel' (ibid.). Similarly—to return once more to the incident of Micaiah and the prophets of Ahab—it is evident that the narrator does not regard the intervention of the lying spirit from Jehovah as abolishing the responsibility or palliating the sin of the prophets. Nor is Saul excused for his acts of treachery towards David on the ground that under the influence of the evil spirit from the Lord he could not help himself. The mention of the evil or lying spirit from the Lord doubtless indicates the presence of a spiritual force dangerous and hostile to man, but its action and its successful malice are certainly accounted by the scriptural writers to be due not to the arbitrary will of God, but to that will accomplishing the punishment of man's sin. Inevitable consequences may be fittingly described as the act of God, by whose laws they are determined. As the

hardening of Pharaoh's heart was the inevitable consequence of previous acts of self-will and pride, so the delusions of the false prophet were the necessary result of the contact between his own moral weakness and the spiritual dullness and unworthiness of the people among whom he lived. From this combination arose his imaginary visions and trances, his unverified declarations of the will of God, his plausible but in the end ruinous advice. To the true prophet with his keen eye for the relation between moral cause and effect the process was manifest. He saw it unfolding itself and knew it to be in accordance with the justice of God. In this sense it was possible to speak of the false prophet as deceived by Jehovah. The fate of these misguided and misguiding leaders of religion was but one example of a rule of universal application. Spiritual blindness is God's punishment for man's abuse of his spiritual faculties. As those who should have directed the steps of others allowed their eyes to be more and more tightly bound with the veil of moral blindness, so more and more completely did they become false prophets, dangerous and potent for evil exactly in proportion to the degree of their own gross self-confidence.

## CHAPTER X

### THE GIFT OF PROPHECY AT PENTECOST

DURING the centuries which preceded the coming of Christ the Jewish people were acutely conscious of the lack of prophetic guidance: 'We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long' (Ps. lxxiv. 9). Under the pressure of national affliction and of a long succession of evil times they learned to look back with yearning regret to the days when 'men of God' had sustained sinking courage and failing faith with messages from heaven. The seers who in the course of this period composed the various Apocalypses did something to supply the need. At least they impressed upon their readers lofty conceptions of the divine justice, assuring them of the certainty of His aid in defence of the cause of righteousness against the aggressions of arrogant oppressors. But the Apocalypticist worked from behind the veil of anonymity. He was no visible and familiar figure. He did not stand forth as the old prophets had done in the crisis of national danger publicly proclaiming the power and the will of the Almighty to deliver His people. He was not there to make answer to the people's appeal in an emergency. He was a voice and nothing more; and his power, such as it was, was the influence of a book, not the force of a living personality. Hence he was but an inadequate substitute for the prophet whose speaking voice and presence and high consciousness

of his own mission inspired others with the vigour of his own enthusiasm. How intense was the desire to recover this lost privilege is unmistakably evident from the profound and general excitement aroused by the appearance of the Baptist. A prophet had come at last. The truth was generally recognized, and the imagination of the people was stirred to the very depths. To them it seemed—and they were not mistaken—that a messenger from God had once more appeared in their midst. Instinctively they felt that another chapter in the relations between God and man was about to be opened, and that the divine guidance for which they had craved would be vouchsafed to them. Their hopes were justified by the event. The new dispensation of which the Baptist was but the forerunner was in truth a dispensation of prophecy. Its Founder did not disdain Himself to bear the title Prophet (Matt. xiii. 57; Luke xxiv. 19). And not only was our Lord Himself pre-eminently the Prophet of the whole world, but the Church which He founded was a Church in which prophecy was to be a continuous possession. Some of the most convincing phenomena of early Christianity were due to the activity of the prophets, who by their undeniably miraculous gifts gave evidence of the presence of the Spirit of God. What these gifts were, and how they contributed to this end, will be the subject of our further consideration.

First a word needs to be said as to the significance of the appropriation of the title prophet by the early Christians. Unfortunately there has arisen a tendency to discriminate between Old Testament and New Testament prophecy, as though the two things were radically distinct in nature, and only equivocally



connected by an identity of name. Or, if the distinction has not been carried to quite such lengths, it has been tacitly assumed that New Testament prophecy was only a pale reflection of the Old Testament institution. Perhaps the idea has been that, while the New Testament prophet enjoyed a fuller knowledge of the truth, he was at the same time less immediately and less potently inspired than the authors of the Old Testament prophetic books. Under the influence of this misconception the term prophet, as applied, for example, to Barnabas, to Silas, or to Agabus, has seemed to be charged with a far smaller and less august meaning than the same title prefixed to the names Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel. This depreciation of New Testament prophecy is surely unjust, and is not warranted by the evidence of early Christian writers. It must be remembered that the Jewish Christians of the first generation regarded the prophets of the Old Testament with the profoundest veneration, treasuring their words and quoting their authority as the most telling of arguments in favour of the new faith. Yet it was these same Christians who did not scruple to claim on behalf of the community to which they belonged the possession of the gift of prophecy. To suppose that they used the word in two different senses is an altogether gratuitous and unnecessary assumption. How could they have selected from their scriptural vocabulary a word with this high significance and have assigned the title of prophet to their own contemporaries except for the plain reason that they credited their fellow Christians with the possession of those very powers which had characterized the ancient prophets. Nothing less than this would have justified the use of the title. The scene on which the prophet

of the New Testament moved was obviously more confined, the interests with which he had to deal were humble ; yet this difference in the scale of manifestation did not invalidate the claim of the early Church to be the home of a renascent prophecy.

The point is worth insisting upon with reference to the elucidation of the problems of the psychology of prophecy. For if prophecy in the Old Testament and in the New be essentially identical, it will follow that we are at liberty to combine the data of the two Testaments. Information derived from the book of the Acts and from the Epistles of S. Paul will serve to illustrate and to test the conclusions reached by means of the evidence of the Old Testament. In this way we may expect to obtain new and valuable insight into the inner springs of prophecy. And that for two reasons. In the first place we shall see prophecy at work under entirely different conditions. Instead of dealing with large issues of national policy the prophet of the New Testament concerned himself with the spiritual needs, the hopes and fears of a few obscure Christians. In the second place the fact of the Incarnation had introduced a new factor of incalculable importance. Further ranges of human capacity hitherto unsuspected had come into view. The recognized presence of the indwelling Spirit had immensely enlarged the scope of man's psychical powers. Hence, though the Old Testament prophets, judged by the standard of fame, far outdistance their New Testament namesakes, yet when the point of comparison is spiritual endowment, the relative positions are reversed. If our Lord could say of John the Baptist that he was a prophet and more than a prophet, and yet that the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than he,

we may unhesitatingly assert that the gift of prophecy which He bestowed on His Church was a richer and fuller endowment than any which had belonged to the earlier dispensation.

Before proceeding to examine in detail some of the passages which illustrate the nature of New Testament prophecy, it will be well to indicate certain limits within which our inquiry will proceed. The special nature of the investigation will render it unnecessary to consider the difficult and much debated question connected with the official position of the prophet in the early Church. That he had an official position at all was scarcely recognized until the discovery of the *Didache* in the last century threw a flood of new light on the organization of the Christian ministry in its earliest years. One section of that little work (chaps. xi ff.) contains directions as to the line of action to be followed by the congregation in the matter of the reception of a prophet. He is not to remain more than three days in one place. If he prolong his sojourn beyond this brief period he is to be accounted a false prophet. If he command a feast he is not himself to partake of it. These and similar details revealed a hitherto unsuspected chapter in the development of the ministry. It appeared that side by side with the permanent settled ministry of the Church, consisting of presbyters and deacons, there had been an itinerant ministry of apostles and prophets, and, moreover, that originally the chief importance and dignity had belonged rather to the latter institution than to the former. With the help of the clue afforded by the *Didache*, the real significance of certain references in the New Testament was recognized. It became apparent that the prophets there mentioned were as much part of the

official machinery of the Church as were the more familiar presbyters and deacons. While a considerable amount of information as to the privileges and obligations of the prophets can thus be brought together, much still remains obscure. The exact relation, for example, between the prophet and the presiding ministers of the congregations which they visited, the position of the prophet when he withdrew from his itinerancy and became resident in some community are questions not yet settled. Perhaps they will always remain incapable of solution unless some new evidence come to light. But these are matters which do not properly come within our purview. They are connected with the question of the official position of the prophet, whereas our object is to investigate his spiritual endowment. That the two things, spiritual endowment and official recognition, will stand in some relation to one another is obvious. For, assuming it to be true—and the evidence for the fact is amply sufficient—that certain individuals in the early Church displayed psychic powers similar to those of the ancient prophets, it was only natural that these exceptional spiritual capacities should have been made the basis of an official authority, with a definite place in the Church's organization. To the historian of the expansion and development of the Church, regarded as the visible embodiment of spiritual forces, such constitutional questions are naturally of primary importance. When, however, we are dealing rather with the psychology of faith and with the internal effects of the Spirit's working on the human soul our attention is turned in another direction. The questions with reference to the New Testament prophet which we shall seek to answer will be similar to those which we have already

discussed in relation to Old Testament prophecy. We shall be busied with the study of the mental phenomena which he exhibited and with the investigation of the conditions under which he received and imparted his revelations.

By far the most important passage in the New Testament bearing on the subject of the psychology of prophecy are those chapters in 1 Corinthians, in which S. Paul discusses at some length the various manifestations of spiritual gifts in the Corinthian Church. In order of time this is the earliest witness to the possession by the Christian Church of so remarkable a faculty. It is a contemporary account, and while entirely sympathetic exhibits at the same time a certain tone of detachment and even of criticism. It is, therefore, for more reasons than one, evidence of the very highest value, and much might be said in favour of beginning the discussion of New Testament prophecy by an immediate examination of S. Paul's language and its implications. There is, however, an alternative and a preferable course. Though composed later, the book of the Acts takes us back to ultimate beginnings, and in the narrative of the events of the day of Pentecost we shall find much that has a close bearing upon the subject in hand. That it is so is no chance coincidence. Prophecy has always been one of the most salient and conspicuous of the signs of the presence of the Spirit among men. And that evidence of this kind should have been forthcoming on the day of Pentecost is only in accordance with the expectation which we should naturally have formed.

It is a striking fact that S. Peter opens his explanatory speech to the people with a reference to the famous passage in which the prophet Joel foretells the



outpouring of the Spirit and its effect in a general outburst of prophecy. 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour forth of my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Yea, and on my servants and on my handmaidens in those days will I pour forth of my spirit and they shall prophesy.' Of the fulfilment of this prediction the assembled crowds had received actual evidence through the medium of their own senses. They had been privileged to witness an hitherto unparalleled exhibition of prophecy. Unparalleled in this respect, that the power, instead of being confined to one or two favoured individuals, had been bestowed on all the members of the apostolic band. For be it observed that the point of the words of Joel is not that a different kind of spirit will be poured forth, but that it will be bestowed on a far wider scale than hitherto. It is to be the general possession of the many instead of the privilege of the few. This extension of the range of the gift involves, however, no change in its character. Thus the first point made in the first Christian sermon that was ever preached is the assertion of this essential identity between Old Testament and New Testament prophecy.

The assertion is made upon the strength of the miracle which had just preceded. What that occurrence was it is therefore necessary to determine with as much precision as the nature of the case will allow. The narrative is not so unambiguous as it may at first sight appear. After the appearance of the tongues of fire and the sound of the great wind, the apostles were 'all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance'.

In the crowded streets of the city a considerable concourse was soon collected. And after reciting the names of the various countries of which representatives were present in the assembly, the historian gives us to understand that all those who stood by seemed miraculously to hear speech in their own mother tongue. 'How hear we, every man in our own language, wherein we were born? . . . We do hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty works of God.' Over the interpretation of this passage there has been no small dispute. The traditional interpretation is in favour of the view that the apostles actually spoke the tongues of the countries here mentioned. Later commentators, on the other hand, have inclined towards a different explanation. There are several reasons which have combined to produce this alteration of opinion. It has been pointed out how highly probable it is that the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost should have been identical with that gift of tongues of which S. Paul speaks at length in the Epistle to the Corinthians. And there is good ground for thinking that the glossolaly of the Corinthians was no miraculous and instantaneous acquaintance with foreign languages, but an ecstatic utterance of modulated sounds poured forth under the influence of highly-strung religious feelings. The remarkably close parallels recorded at various times in Church history, and occurring at intervals even down to our own time, afford one of the strongest arguments in favour of this view. When once the fact of glossolaly thus understood has been frankly recognized it will be found that the references in the New Testament exhibit a remarkable consistency with this interpretation. It is so with the passage in the Acts which we are considering. Though

superficially it may seem to favour the more marvellous interpretation, yet, as has been carefully pointed out by Mr. Rackham in his recent commentary, there are not wanting various considerations which go far to weaken the force of this conclusion. When the apostles spoke with tongues it is clear that they were in no sense expounding the gospel. They were speaking 'the mighty works of God'. In other words, they were giving utterance to praises and thanksgivings. Presumably their hearers gathered the general sense of their utterance so far as to know that it was praise to God for His goodness, but had to wait for the explanation of these praises until S. Peter gave his account of the matter in a speech made probably in Aramaic. The crowd is described as consisting, not of pilgrims, but of dwellers at Jerusalem, and it is therefore tolerably certain that they were all quite competent to understand the common speech. If this were so, no particular purpose would have been served by a miraculous communication to the apostles of a knowledge of the mother tongues of the people whom they were addressing. It would have been nothing but a portent. And it is a well-known fact that the occurrence of portents is conspicuously absent from the records of the miraculous in the books of the New Testament, which in this particular matter offers a very marked contrast with the apocryphal literature. Some of those who were present and heard the apostles speak with tongues imagined them to be intoxicated. The prejudiced people who suggested this explanation were probably not very observant, and their opinion is not worth much consideration. Yet it is a little more intelligible that it should have arisen in their minds if we assume that the apostles' utterance consisted

of only partially articulate sounds. It should also be observed that the speaking with tongues which occurred at the conversion of Cornelius is distinctly declared to be identical with that of the day of Pentecost (Acts x. 47). On the later occasion there is nothing whatever to suggest that the tongue was a foreign language.<sup>1</sup>

How, then, are we to account for the impression produced upon the crowd, and for their consciousness of hearing their own languages spoken to them? Mr. Rackham contents himself with the suggestion that the ecstatic utterance may have been composed partly of foreign words. 'At the same time,' he writes, 'verses 8 and 11 require that some of the utterances should, as was natural, have been clothed in foreign words.' It is not a very happy or plausible explanation, being out of harmony with the general line of interpretation adopted in the author's comments on the passage; nor is it in fact required in order to account for the general illusion. The impression of hearing their own tongues may have been otherwise caused. It is, to say the least, a conceivable hypothesis that it was an instance of thought transference coupled with the internal translation of thoughts so aroused into the language with which the percipients happened to be most familiar. Glossolaly was, we must remember, a manifest indication of the presence of a very strong tide of religious feeling in the heart of the speaker. We know from other passages in the New Testament that it was not uncommon for these feelings to be recognized and put into intelligible words by an interpreter. Reserving for the present the further consideration of this power of interpretation and its

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Rackham, *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 19 ff.

connexion both with tongues and with prophecy, we need here only notice the fact, and point out what help it provides towards a solution of the difficulty which we are considering. If the powerful feelings which filled the hearts of the apostles on this occasion and manifested themselves in the strange utterances of tongues communicated themselves to the bystanders in such wise that they became conscious of the train of thought in the minds of the speakers, then it is quite in accordance with the observed facts of psychology that the mental impulse thus given and received should have called up in the minds of the percipients appropriate words belonging to their own mother tongues. The more intense the feeling of the speaker, the stronger will be the mental influence produced, and the likelier it becomes that the effect of thought transference will follow. Now on this special occasion, when the anxiously awaited fulfilment of the promise of the Spirit was actually coming to pass, the enthusiasm of praise must have exceeded all bounds. And perhaps in this intensity of feeling we may see a partial explanation of the circumstance that so many of the listeners found themselves capable of interpreting the apostolic utterances.

Supposing this to be in essentials a correct account of the occurrence on the day of Pentecost, we may notice with interest that not only was the gift of tongues manifested on a great scale, but also the correlative gift of interpretation. Moreover, the same incident reveals a close connexion between the new prophecy and glossolaly. And this connexion was, so far as is known, a new fact. That the prophets of the Old Testament often spoke under the influence of the strongest mental excitement is certain. But there



is no trace of the use of this peculiar ecstatic utterance among them. In the earliest times, as we have learnt from the books of Samuel, their excitement revealed itself more by the violent actions of their bodies than by peculiarities of speech. There is, however, a certain measure of analogy between the two cases, the fervour of religious feeling finding relief in the one instance by means of the disordered exercise of the faculty of motion, in the other by a similarly disordered exercise of the faculty of speech. Occasions are known in history when the two sets of symptoms have been united, and convulsive movements of the body have been combined with the utterance of strange sounds. Of this combination, however, there is no record in Scripture.

Other references to prophecy and tongues in the Acts may be dealt with in more summary fashion. The important spiritual significance ascribed by the early Christians to the sign of the tongues is evident in the history of the conversion of Cornelius. On that occasion it was regarded by S. Peter as in itself conveying sufficient warrant for the critical new departure of the baptism of Gentiles (x. 47). Again, it was not till after their baptism and confirmation that the twelve disciples at Ephesus spake with tongues and prophesied (xix. 6). The same book contains two examples of prediction by Christian prophets. Agabus foretold the widespread famine in the days of the Emperor Claudius (xi. 28). S. Paul, on his way to Jerusalem, received repeated intimations of the fate which should there befall him. 'The Holy Ghost testifieth to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me' (xx. 23). Evidently the gift of prophecy must have been widely disseminated throughout the Christian com-

munities, if S. Paul can thus speak of receiving these supernatural communications 'in every city'.

Infrequent as are the references to prophecy in the book of the Acts, they at least suffice to establish the following positions: The new prophecy, widely prevalent among the members of the Christian Church, and bestowed upon men and women alike, was the recognized and acknowledged proof of the presence of the Spirit. Between prophecy and tongues there was the closest connexion, so close as to render the two terms almost interchangeable, or at any rate to allow of tongues being treated as a species of prophecy. Finally Christian prophecy was unmistakably marked with that note of spiritual tension and excitement which we found to be the usual though not invariable accompaniment of prophecy in the Old Testament. In order to carry the inquiry further it will be necessary now to turn to S. Paul's account of these matters, which is given in 1 Corinthians.

## CHAPTER XI

### TONGUES AND THEIR INTERPRETATION IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

IN 1 Cor. xii-xiv S. Paul reviews at length the whole question of 'spiritual gifts' considered in relation to the life of the Church. And since the problem of prophecy cannot be properly studied except in connexion with those manifold spiritual endowments of which it was only one example, it follows that the general principles that underlie the apostle's treatment of the subject merit very careful scrutiny. He begins this section of his Epistle by a strong affirmation of the unity of the Spirit, from whom the various gifts in all their multiplicity are derived. 'Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord. And there are diversities of workings, but the same God, who worketh all things in all. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal' (xii. 4 ff.). Coming thus from the same divine source, all gifts will exhibit certain broad similarities, and will be subject in use to the same guiding obligations. Every gift, for example, is bestowed on its possessor with a view to the benefit of the community as a whole, and may not be regarded and exploited as the peculiar privilege or property of the individual in whose person it happens to exhibit itself. This contention S. Paul enforces by means of the parallel between the Church and the body; and the climax of his argument under this

head is reached in his noble exposition of the superiority of charity over all particular gifts, however marvellous in their manifestation and beneficial in their exercise. It is not until he has with the utmost emphasis laid down this general principle that S. Paul turns to the discussion of the separate gifts. Of these multifarious activities he has already given a rough enumeration, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, workings of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues (xii. 8 ff.). Even the bare mention of the names suffices to show that in the opinion of the apostle a spiritual gift was not of necessity and essentially something marvellous and inexplicable. They are all equally supernatural; they are not all in the same degree obviously miraculous. Miracles, indeed, are specially mentioned. Gifts of healings imply something more than the successful application of ordinary remedies, and clearly refer to the sudden cures of which there was no lack in the days of primitive Christianity. Prophecy and tongues also pass beyond the line of the purely natural, though how far beyond we have not yet attempted to determine. But there are other gifts mentioned which, to the unenlightened observer, must have been indistinguishable from the ordinary endowments of talent. The word of wisdom and the word of knowledge would have exercised no overwhelming effect upon the mind of the outsider, who, even if possessing the insight to recognize the word spoken as the expression of a true wisdom, would not at once have been convinced thereby that the speaker was inspired with the Spirit of God. For to such a gift no outward and visible marvel was attached. The inference is clear. S. Paul, while intensely conscious

of the presence of the marvellous, even within the circle of his own experience—he spake with tongues more than they all—yet in no wise lends the weight of his authority to the view that the greater the marvel the more evident the presence of the power of the Spirit. On the contrary, the reality of the divine presence and influence was guaranteed by other and more cogent evidence belonging to the moral order, the witness of purified and ennobled human characters. Thus the element of the marvellous is put by the apostle into its proper position of subordination. It does not receive from him that undue measure of attention which in later times has sometimes been assigned to it. Indeed the witness of history seems to point to the conclusion that the actual occurrence of the marvellous is a safeguard against the exaggeration of its value as evidence. It was in later centuries when the power of the Spirit over nature ceased to manifest itself except obscurely and infrequently that miracles were taken as the fundamental proof of the Christian faith. In the Apostolic age it was certainly otherwise. Then the power of the Spirit to work miracles was indisputable ; yet not through signs such as these did He convince the world so much as through the changed lives of the followers of the Way. How relatively unimportant was the marvellous in the eyes of S. Paul is evident from his estimate of the comparative value of the diverse spiritual gifts. Those which are no more than mere signs and wonders are distinctly regarded by him as inferior.

We have noticed how in S. Luke's account of Pentecost tongues and prophecy are brought into the closest possible juxtaposition. There was, indeed, no reason why he should pause to point out the distinction



between them, since both were striking and closely allied signs of the advent of a new spiritual power into the world. S. Paul, on the other hand, contrasts the one with the other, handling the question in such a way as to lay stress rather on the differences than on the points of identity between the two. As signs the two gifts may come close together, as means to edification there is a wide interval between them. To the psychologist the discussion is specially interesting. For though the apostle himself exhibits no direct interest in the mental conditions of the possessors of spiritual gifts, yet in his careful and even elaborate examination of the difference between tongues and prophecy he throws a great deal of light on some essential points of the problem.

We have already rejected the distinction made by certain commentators between the tongues mentioned in the Acts, and the tongues discussed by S. Paul, declaring in favour of the view that there was but one and the same gift, and that it was the power to utter strange sounds, inarticulate or only semi-articulate, yet expressive of the deepest and warmest feelings of the heart under the influence of powerful religious excitement. How sounds of this kind could produce this effect may be illustrated by means of the analogy of music, which in its own way is a more pliant and adequate means for the expression of emotion than language can ever be. The utterance in a tongue may have been something in the nature of a song without words, a succession of sounds bearing a resemblance to words, but having no articulate or grammatical structure.

The first question as to the psychology of tongues which presents itself is this: Was the speaker himself conscious of the meaning of the sounds which he

uttered? If those sounds were not real words, the question resolves itself into the inquiry whether the speaker was aware of the feelings to which, as a matter of fact, he was giving expression by means of the tongue. At first sight it might seem obvious to answer that in the nature of things a man must be conscious of his own feelings, whatever may be the particular mode of expression into which those feelings translate themselves. But such an answer would fail to take account of the possibilities of abnormal consciousness. And that the speaker with tongues was in some kind of abnormal or unusual mental condition is apparent. In fact the natural inference from S. Paul's words is that as a rule the speaker was so far unconscious of what he was doing that he could not immediately afterwards put into words the thoughts and feelings which he had just poured forth in a tongue. 'Wherefore let him that speaketh in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful' (xiv. 13, 14). This certainly appears to mean that even at the time of utterance the speaker was not sufficiently master of himself to be aware of what was passing in his mind. Evidently he was experiencing some degree of ecstasy or trance, and it is one of the symptoms of that condition that on issuing from it the subject is oblivious of that which he has said and done while under its influence. This subsequent unconsciousness was very commonly supposed by the bystanders to prove that it was not really the man himself who had spoken, but some other being of which he was no more than the instrument; as, for example, the Delphic priestess was taken to be the mouthpiece of Apollo. S. Paul does not share this way of thinking. He never suggests that the speaker

with tongues is merely the organ of a power outside himself. On the contrary, while allowing that the man's understanding is not engaged, he emphatically asserts that it is his spirit which is active. 'My spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful' (1 Cor. xiv. 14). It is true that the words 'my spirit' might conceivably be taken to mean 'the spirit which speaks through me';<sup>1</sup> but the obvious parallelism between the terms spirit and understanding render it practically certain that S. Paul is here distinguishing between two parts of human nature. Expressing these facts in the language of modern psychology, we might say that the utterance in the tongue was the product of the action of the subliminal consciousness. And since the subliminal self is a constituent part of personality—no mere excrescence, but an essential and necessary element of our being—it would follow that the feelings so expressed would be the man's own feelings and the output of his own spirit, even though no record of them remained behind in his conscious memory. Hence, beneficial as was the exercise to himself, it was not a benefit which he could transmit to others except upon one condition, viz. the presence of an interpreter, who might be either himself or another. Tongues and the interpretation of tongues are, in fact, so closely connected together that no theory can be considered satisfactory which does not equally take account of both.

In an interesting paper on the question Dr. Wright has called particular attention to the fact of interpretation, holding it to be in itself a sufficient proof that the tongue must have been a real language, but one of which the speaker was in his normal state ignorant.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the expression 'the spirits of the prophets' discussed below, pp. 181 ff.

Rejecting the notion that some of the early Christians were miraculously endowed with the knowledge of foreign languages for the purpose of facilitating missionary enterprise, he believes that the memory of the speakers under a condition of abnormal excitation recalled the words and phrases of languages which they may have heard years before and had now in their ordinary state completely forgotten. That the human memory is capable of such feats is amply established by the records of various cases. As regards, therefore, the possibility of his explanation no objection can be raised. 'We have seen,' he writes, 'that if, according to the ancient view, the speaker understood what he was saying, the office of the interpreter was unnecessary; and that if, according to the modern view, speaking with tongues consisted of incoherent cries, interpretation was impossible.'<sup>1</sup> From the first part of this argument there is no reason to dissent. If the gift of tongues was in fact the bestowal of the miraculous knowledge of foreign languages, the special and separate gift of the interpretation of tongues would seem to have no place left for it. For it is clearly impossible to distinguish between the knowledge of a language and the power to interpret from that language. But the latter part of Dr. Wright's statement, to the effect that if the tongues were incoherent utterances interpretation was impossible, is exceedingly disputable. And this will at once be evident if we refer once again to the analogy of music. A musical composition may have a very definite meaning, and that meaning capable of being put into words, though with a certain amount of loss in the translation from one medium of expression into another. The interpretation so given may be

<sup>1</sup> A. Wright, *Some New Testament Problems*, p. 299.

substantially accurate, while, of course, there can be no exact or close correspondence between the separate musical notes and the separate words of the interpretation. A precisely similar process is to be assumed with regard to the interpretation of tongues. Incoherent, or, more properly speaking, inarticulate, the sounds of the tongue may have been; but such incoherence or inarticulateness is not to be confused with absence of meaning. Behind the mere sounds were, we believe, definite thoughts and feelings in the mind of the speaker, which the interpreter was capable of making known to the rest of the congregation, thus giving them the opportunity of sharing in the exaltation of spirit of which the tongue was the outcome. The ability to do so was a special power distinct from the gift of tongues in itself, though the two gifts might coexist in the same person. When speaker and interpreter were two different persons, then psychologically the power of interpretation was akin to that of thought-reading. To the thoughts and feelings in the mind of the speaker the mind of the interpreter responded so vividly and so accurately that he was able to put them into language. What part the actual sounds played in the process it is not possible to determine. Nor is it necessary. We have already seen that the sounds in themselves were probably meaningless, except so far as they may have conveyed rough indications of the state of mind of the speaker. And, if so, the interpreter was not so much a translator of words—words probably there were none to translate—as a revealer to the assembled company of the mental processes which lay behind the utterance of the speaker. That this should be described as the interpretation of the tongue is natural enough. We should be making



demand for an impossible degree of accuracy of description if we were to insist on inferring, as does Dr. Wright, from the use of this particular term that the tongue actually consisted of significant sounds. If we may hazard the conjecture, we may reasonably suppose that the most accurate and detailed record of the sounds and syllables uttered would probably have been found to convey no meaning whatever, either to the most learned linguist or to the most gifted interpreter. Only in the presence of the speaker, and under the influence of the mysterious spiritual bond which brought one mind into touch with another, could the task of interpretation be accomplished.

Psychologically the case was different when a man interpreted himself. Then, of course there was no need for thought transference. What was required was a certain continuity of consciousness between the ecstatic and the normal state. The condition of entire forgetfulness which generally succeeds the trance is not of invariable occurrence. It will sometimes happen that just as the seer will retain a vivid memory of the vision vouchsafed to him in trance, so the speaker may be empowered to recollect the thoughts which swept through his mind, and to which he gave expression in the fervid utterance of the tongue. In these circumstances he can then find for them a secondary expression by means of ordinary language, and this time in such a way as to render them intelligible to his fellows.

In favour of the above theory of tongues and their interpretation it may be said that it is applicable not only to the facts recorded in the New Testament, but also to the comparatively recent events which occurred in the assemblies of the 'Catholic Apostolic Church'.

It will be remembered how in the case of the disciples of Irving it was at first supposed that the strange sounds must be some foreign language, the speech of some remote people to whom the inspired person would be able immediately to communicate the gospel message. Miss Mary Campbell, who was the first to exhibit this phenomenon, imagined herself to be speaking in the language of a group of islands in the South Pacific Ocean. Her belief, however, was never confirmed.<sup>1</sup> The actual sounds produced have in some instances been preserved. For instance, Miller quotes the following fragments: *Ythis dil emma sumo*, supposed to mean, 'I will undertake this dilemma.' *Hozeghin alta stare*, 'Jesus in the highest,' *Holimoth holif awthaw*, 'Holy, most Holy Father,' *Hoze hamena nostra*, 'Jesus will take our hands,' *Casa sera hastha caro*, 'This house will still be in my care.'<sup>2</sup> It is impossible not to recognize here dim and fragmentary reminiscences of English, Latin, and Italian words. Yet there is no reason for suspecting the speakers of fraud. They evidently cried out under the pressure of an uncontrollable excitement, which was no counterfeit. The normal functions of speech were thrown out of gear by the force of the religious emotions behind. How strong these emotions were, and how forcibly they impressed the spectators, is brought out clearly in the following passage: "Do you know," said one of the prophets, "what it is to have the Word of God as a fire in your bones?" To many, a mysterious power seemed to bear along the speaker almost without his or her origination or even connivance. The rapt attention that prevailed around, the unearthly sounds

<sup>1</sup> E. Miller, *History and Doctrines of Irvingism*, i. p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, i. 72.

that preceded the more articulate speech, the scathing rebuke that was often administered to unbelief, and the strong religious tone that was conspicuous in all that was said, added to the fear of God's judgements which had been previously excited in men's minds, commended these utterances as being a direct interposition from Above.'<sup>1</sup>

Hitherto the point under consideration has been the relation between the gift of tongues and the speaker's 'understanding', or, as we should now express it, his consciousness. We have seen how clearly the language of S. Paul, illustrated and confirmed by the phenomena of religious excitement in later times, leads to the conclusion that during the time of utterance this element of man's nature was in abeyance. Another and even more important question remains to be asked : What was the function of man's will as regards the gift ? Was he a free agent in its use and control ? Evidently the power of speaking with tongues was one which, so far as its acquisition was concerned, lay entirely outside the domain of the human will. It was correctly described by the word 'gift'. For no amount of application and practice could help a man to its attainment. The capacity came to him, as it seemed, independently of any efforts of his own. It was the effect of grace, and in the truest sense of the word, a charisma. But although in this matter human exertions were as powerless as the money of Simon Magus to produce the desired result, yet indirectly prayers and desires exercised a very important influence. The earnest desire for spiritual gifts generally, and more especially for prophecy, which S. Paul emphatically recommends,<sup>2</sup> implies more than an attitude of

<sup>1</sup> Miller, *Irvingism*, i. 74.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 1.

mere passivity. It suggests a condition of effort sustained and persistent, a full exercise of the energy of prayer. And the underlying assumption of the exhortation is that the Holy Spirit may be expected to respond to the petition and to bestow a gift in accordance with the request. Conversely what is not sought will not be found, and what is not asked for will not be received. It is an important principle of which it is possible that we are experiencing the effects at the present time. The almost entire disappearance of many among the charismata from the life of the Church may perhaps be due to the circumstance that for so long they have ceased to be the object of the Church's prayers. In the matter of the gift of healing a different position seems about to be taken up, and already a certain change is becoming noticeable. From many quarters comes evidence, which it is hard to dispute, of the bestowal of this special gift upon certain persons. Such facts point to the conclusion that an attitude of desire and expectancy is a condition required on man's part before the bestowal of the gifts can be realized. So far, then, as the action of the will enters into the determination of this attitude, it contributes to satisfy a condition without which the gifts remain unattainable. It is in accordance with analogy that it should be so. In all the dealings of God with man an effort of the human will is required. Mere acquiescence is not enough; there must be a due measure of co-operation.

But while the part played by the will in the acquisition of the gift of tongues was at best subsidiary and indirect, it was quite otherwise with its action in the matter of the control of the gift when once bestowed. On this point S. Paul's definite statements leave no room for hesitation. He distinctly assumes that the

responsibility for the manner in which the gift is used will rest upon the shoulders of those who enjoy the privilege of its possession. 'If any man speaketh in a tongue, let it be by two, or at most three, and that in turn; and let one interpret: but if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God (xiv. 27, 28). Obviously the advice as to the control of the gift would be beside the mark, were the utterance strictly involuntary; and the fact that the command to keep silence in certain circumstances is given enables us to draw an important inference with regard to the apostle's view of the nature of inspiration. For while he certainly regarded the speaker with tongues as inspired, his words are inconsistent with any theory of inspiration which makes out the human spirit to be as passive 'as a lyre struck by the plectrum'. According to the teaching of the passage, the man in question, notwithstanding his inspiration, retained his liberty of choice between speech and silence. Inspiration and responsibility were not mutually exclusive. And if it be contended that the same liberty of discrimination was not extended to the great prophets of the Old Testament on account of the supposed exceptional quality of their inspiration, we shall fall back in reply upon the conclusions that we have already reached as to the essential identity of prophetic inspiration under the two dispensations. If in the Christian congregation at Corinth the inspired man could speak or be silent as he chose, and was in fact held accountable for coming to the right decision, we need not doubt but that the same freedom of action and corresponding responsibility rested with the famous prophets of the old time.



Possibly it may be thought that this recognition of the capacity of the speaker with tongues to resist the influence of his gift is inconsistent with the theory that he gave forth his utterances in a state of ecstasy. For if in ecstasy, where would his responsibility have come in? And if conscious enough to decide whether he should or should not speak, must he not also have been sufficiently master of himself to be aware of the feelings which he was expressing in the tongue? Plausible as the dilemma may appear at first sight, its apparent cogency disappears when we take into account the actual facts of trance. In that abnormal condition it often happens that the impulse towards automatism—and speech in a tongue is to be classed among the automatic activities—is at the first not beyond the control of the will; but when once given free play it is no longer to be restrained by any effort. There is a critical moment for decision just before the sub-conscious activities begin to operate. When once they are in full course, then the vision is seen, or the speech uttered, apparently without any intervention of the man's own will. It is as though from that moment forward, until the impulse have exhausted itself, he were carried along by an overmastering power. Thus we may conceive it to have been with regard to the tongues in the meetings of the Christian congregation at Corinth. If the will of the speaker was to be exercised at all it was necessary that it should be exercised at the beginning; and this is precisely what the language of S. Paul seems to suggest. Nothing that he says implies control of the tongue by the speaker when once the utterance has begun.

There is yet another point which deserves to be noticed. S. Paul's advice is for the most part given

not to the individual speaker but to the community at large. And for this there is good reason. Under the exceptional psychical conditions which evidently prevailed in the Corinthian Church the collective will of the assembled congregation must have had more than common power over the individual wills of those present. The study of the peculiar psychological phenomena which appear when men are brought simultaneously under some strong influence has become a recognized part of psychology. It is a subject which has been very ably treated by Professor Le Bon in his book on the psychology of the crowd.<sup>1</sup> It must be admitted that it is a difficult and perplexing study, in which results are far from easy to reach and to substantiate. Yet while much remains questionable, this at least is certain, that one of the effects of a common excitement experienced by any number of people is to weaken in a marked degree the ordinary inhibitions of self-control. When the wave of intense feeling passes over an assembly its individual members appear to be so carried off their feet as no longer to retain in the same degree their usual power over themselves. They become partly irresponsible. The collective will of the crowd appears to be endowed with a life and being of its own, distinct in its characteristics from those of the separate members. To this collective will S. Paul primarily addresses his exhortations. Control of the speakers with tongues will rest more with the congregation as a whole than with the individuals who happen to possess the gift. If the congregation be all a-quiver with excitement that the exhibition should take place, that fact in itself adds greatly to the likelihood of the occurrence. Conversely,

<sup>1</sup> G. le Bon, *The Crowd. A Study of the Popular Mind*, pp. 33 ff.

the settled determination of the congregation that there shall be no disorder, and that the exhibition, if it occur at all, shall be controlled in the way suggested by S. Paul, must have a sobering effect on those who are near the edge of ecstasy. Taking these facts into account, we shall feel that some qualification is necessary in the assignment of responsibility for the use of their gift to the speakers with tongues. They were responsible doubtless. But their responsibility was shared by their fellow Christians. For in some measure they were only the exponents of the temper of the congregation of which they formed part. And as it was with the gift of tongues so it was with the other charismata. Both their acquisition and their use were matters largely under the control of the congregation. The community provided an atmosphere favourable or the reverse to the nurture of these powers. Nor is this recognition of the importance of environment in any way inconsistent with the divine origin of the gifts. They come from God, but God does not bestow His gifts indiscriminately. His grace works effectively where men are eager to receive and to respond to it. It was therefore the bounden duty of the community so to regulate its life as to furnish a field for the development of the charismata, and more especially of the superior charismata, of prophecy in preference to tongues.

## CHAPTER XII

### PROPHECY IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

FROM one point of view prophecy and tongues are the most closely allied members within the group of the charismata. It needed only the presence of an interpreter to transform the utterance of a tongue into the equivalent of prophecy, an interpreted tongue serving the precise purpose of prophecy in the stimulus which it afforded to the religious sentiments of the congregation. But there is also another point of view to be considered, from which the two gifts in question are seen to stand wide apart from one another, prophecy at the head of the scale, tongues at the bottom. The former was a direct means of edification, the latter in itself conferred little or no benefit on the community. Hence, although psychologically the line dividing tongues from prophecy is by no means broad, they rank, nevertheless, very differently in the apostle's estimate. Yet no difference of value must be allowed to obscure the fact that both, being charismata, impose the same obligations upon their possessors. Much that we have already said with regard to tongues is applicable also to prophecy. Prophecy, like every other charisma, was unattainable by any effort on man's part. It was a gift of the divine bounty and to be gratefully accepted accordingly. That this statement does not exclude the co-operation of man's will, especially in the direction of prayer, is evident from S. Paul's explicit direction that men should aim at

prophecy (xiv. 1). Men might and should pray to be inspired in this way rather than in others. While, however, S. Paul was intensely conscious of the gratuitous and supernatural character of prophecy, he would never, on that account, have drawn a hard and sharp line of division between it and other human powers or talents. To him every human capacity was a gift of God to man, of which he was but the steward, and for which he must render strict account. We cannot, therefore, suppose that S. Paul made a distinction between the endowment of prophecy and the endowment of wisdom, or of the faculty for administration, as though the first were due to the direct action of the inspiring grace of God, the others only to the quickening and heightening of ordinary talents. He teaches that all alike are in the final analysis due to the action of the Holy Spirit, and are, therefore, the product of Inspiration. It is, accordingly, no disparagement of prophecy that it should be grouped with wisdom and knowledge, with governments and helps; but this classification informs us how these other gifts not usually regarded as supernatural may yet be as truly inspired as is prophecy itself. We may go a step further. The inspired governor is the man who, being naturally fitted for that particular duty, uses his capacity with a scrupulous conscientiousness under the guidance of God's Spirit; even so we believe the prophet to have been the man who, being naturally equipped with psychic powers, used them with equal conscientiousness in the service of God.

S. Paul leaves us in no doubt as to why he places prophecy at the head of the charismata. It is because of the influence for good which can thereby be exerted on the community. Prophecy more than any other



gift, is useful for edification and exhortation and comfort (xiv. 3). Careful note must be taken of what is here told us of the end and object of prophecy. To know the final cause of a faculty is to be on the road to obtain an understanding of the methods of its working. And in this matter what S. Paul refrains from saying is no less important than what he explicitly states. There is, it will be observed, no direct reference to the prophet's power of prediction. That the Christian prophets were not lacking in this faculty we know, from passages in the Acts to which we have already referred. Yet evidently S. Paul was far from thinking, as some later Christian teachers have thought, that prediction was the most salient and most characteristic of the prophet's faculties. In his eyes the prophet was primarily a preacher, but at the same time no common preacher. He is one from whose lips come utterances of a kind which cannot be accounted for as due to the unaided exercise of human faculties. Under the influence of a reaction against the misconception of the prophet as primarily a foreteller of the future, there has been a tendency to represent him as little more than an exceptionally able preacher of righteousness. But, according to S. Paul's presentation of the case he is far more than that. Within him there is a power from God enabling him in a supernatural way and by supernatural means to awaken the dormant conscience, and to stir into life the torpid capacities of the heart. Where the speaker with tongues can at most startle and surprise, the prophet can advise and persuade, can induce penitence and kindle the flame of faith.

Further light is thrown upon the real nature of prophecy by its juxtaposition with various alternatives

to tongues in xiv. 6. 'Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine.' From this verse it may be inferred that, as distinct from unintelligible tongues, intelligible utterance in the congregation might assume various forms. Four kinds are mentioned by name, of which the distinguishing characteristics are revelation, knowledge, prophecy, teaching. It would certainly be a mistake to suppose that there were four entirely distinct methods of discourse, between which it was possible to draw sharp lines of division. But while fully admitting that one kind of address might merge by imperceptible gradations into another, we must also maintain that in S. Paul's mind there existed a clear scheme of classification, which we must endeavour to elucidate. In order to do this we will examine in turn each of the words which he uses.

It is evident that 'revelation' must here bear a more restricted meaning than it often carries elsewhere. Frequently it is used to signify a supernatural intimation the mode of which is not further specified. Cf. Gal. ii. 2, Eph. i. 17, iii. 3. But there are other passages where the context points to the more definite connotation of vision. It seems, for example, to have this narrower signification in 2 Cor. xii. 1, where S. Paul writes of the 'visions and revelations of the Lord'. And that this is the case in the passage before us is to be inferred from the further use of the word in v. 26, where a 'revelation' is mentioned as an alternative for a psalm, a teaching, a tongue, or an interpretation. The power of seeing visions was one of the recognized spiritual gifts, and apparently there were

among the Corinthian Christians some who possessed the capacity, and were as eager to display their proficiency as were the speakers with tongues. While one of the congregation would be excitedly pouring forth his outburst of praise in a tongue, another would be relating his latest vision. Hence the disorder. But the gift was good and desirable in itself. Just as S. Paul claims to speak with tongues more than they all (xiv. 18), so also he asserts a like pre-eminence in the privilege of seeing visions (2 Cor. xii. 1-4.)

The second kind of address to which the apostle refers he describes as an utterance 'by way of knowledge'. That the Corinthians were inclined to attach an altogether exaggerated importance to the intellectual presentment of the faith we know from S. Paul's language of protest at the opening of the Epistle (i. 26 ff.). But while the faith is no mere philosophy, there is room for the form of wisdom in the Christian economy (ii. 6, 7). As the Christian convert advanced towards the full development of his powers he became increasingly capable of assimilating this divine wisdom, and it was fitting that it should be provided for him. S. Paul himself undertook the duty when the conditions were favourable. He was willing to 'speak wisdom among them that are perfect' (ii. 6). And, in accordance with his principle that all human powers are in their proper exercise prompted and controlled by the Divine Spirit, he recognized the existence of a special spiritual gift enabling its possessor to do this intellectual work on behalf of his fellows. 'To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge' (xii. 8). It is not only the power of understanding the mysteries of the faith which is thus given, but the ability to transmit that

perception of the truth to others. It was a most indispensable function, and especially so in the intellectual atmosphere of a Greek city like Corinth. The Church would not have been properly equipped for her task, had she not numbered among her members men with this faculty of exposition. When an address of this kind was delivered in the congregation there was a manifestation of the charisma of the word of knowledge. Yet this good gift also had been degraded into a means of self-advertisement.

Leaving prophecy until the last, we proceed next to inquire what S. Paul intended to signify by an address given 'in the way of teaching'. Evidently he has some distinction in his mind between words spoken under the influence of the charisma of the word of knowledge, and another kind of discourse involving the use of the gift of teaching. How important an endowment he believed the latter to be is apparent from the position which he assigns to those who possess it (xii. 28). 'First apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers.' The degree of value thus ascribed to teaching provides us with the clue of which we are in search. For we know that the criterion by which S. Paul judged of the comparative dignity of spiritual gifts was the measure of benefit which they conferred upon the Church. If we assume the gift of teaching to have been the power to convey to the newly converted the more elementary instruction in the principles of the Christian faith, we shall understand why S. Paul rated it so highly. For without it the expansion of the Church would be checked at the outset. The absence of the charisma of the word of knowledge would doubtless involve loss, but not of so serious a nature. In the one case there would be no beginning

of the good work, in the other its completion would be delayed. Without the operation of the gift of teaching in the Church converts would never properly grasp the meaning of the first principles of Christianity ; without the word of knowledge the further development of the more advanced members would be temporarily arrested. Applying this distinction to the verse before us, we obtain a satisfactory explanation of S. Paul's meaning. The discourse given ' in the way of teaching ' would be one that dealt with the elements of the faith in such fashion as to bring home the new truth to the minds of inquirers ; that given in the way of knowledge would be intended for the elucidation of difficulties which could only present themselves at a later stage.

Of the four kinds of discourse before the congregation one only now remains to be considered, viz. prophecy. And already we have secured some negative results from our discussion. Prophecy was not addressed principally to the intellect, like teaching or the word of knowledge. It was not a revelation in the sense of a vision narrated by the seer to his fellow Christians and making its appeal to their imaginations. It was addressed to the heart and conscience. But so, it may be said, is all preaching. Yes, and in these respects, therefore, prophecy did not differ from preaching. But it had at the same time peculiar features of its own which raised it far above the ordinary level, and marked it out as a special charisma, and as the most beneficial of all the charismata. Doubtless the utterance of the prophet exhibited the usual signs of great mental intensity. We may well believe that he displayed that marvellous fluency and those other oratorical gifts which are characteristic of inspirational



speaking.<sup>1</sup> It is probable, also, that he seemed to himself to be uttering words independently of his own will. This sense of being led to give expression to thoughts put into the mind from an external source is vividly present in trance speech. Once again the experience of an Irvingite disciple may serve as an appropriate illustration. 'I found on a sudden,' writes Mr. Baxter, 'in the midst of my accustomed course, a power coming upon me which was altogether new, an unnatural and in many cases an appalling utterance given me; matters uttered by me in the power of which I had never thought, and many of which I did not understand until long after they were uttered.'<sup>2</sup> Without in the least wishing to affirm any equality between the respective prophesyings of the Corinthian and the Irvingite churches, we may legitimately avail ourselves of any light which the later occurrences may throw on the matter. And certainly there is no improbability in the supposition that the Corinthian prophets were subject to as strong a feeling of pressure from without as finds expression in the candid statement of Mr. Baxter. And undoubtedly this conviction of being charged with a definite message lends to the manner of delivery an immense impressiveness, which cannot fail to have a profound effect upon the audience. But in addition to these characteristics, which belong rather to the manner than to the contents of the prophetic utterance, there were other and more notable features which specially distinguished prophecy. What these were we may infer from those verses in which S. Paul describes the contrast between the effect of tongues and of prophecy upon the stranger

<sup>1</sup> G. Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, ii, pp. 134 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Miller, *Lib. cit.*, i, 74.

entering the place of meeting (xiv. 22-25). This contrast is presented in two ways that are not, strictly speaking, entirely consistent with one another. In the first place it is said that while tongues are for a sign to the unbeliever, prophecy is intended for the benefit of those who already believe. In so speaking, S. Paul was evidently thinking of the startling effect inevitably produced by the phenomenon of the tongues. The converted Christian had no further need of this sign; the heathen, on the other hand, might be induced by it to turn his attention towards the evidence forthcoming in favour of the new religion, and so might be brought to conversion. But, secondly, S. Paul has no sooner said this than he immediately sets forth certain other considerations which go far to modify if not to correct the first statement. Is it true, as he has said, that to tongues belongs a certain superiority as a sign to the unbeliever? Superficially, indeed, tongues may appear to be the more extraordinary marvel. But only superficially. For even the unbeliever, if he be thoughtful, will recognize a more unmistakable sign of supernatural power in prophecy than in tongues. S. Paul pictures the scene for us in order that we may fully understand how this result will follow. If the unbeliever enter the Christian meeting-place and find the assembled company speaking with tongues, he cannot but be astonished at a phenomenon such as he has never before encountered. His surprise may possibly lead him to further inquiry, and so in the end to membership in the body. But on the other hand he may very likely dismiss the whole subject from his mind, content with the easy explanation that the sounds pouring from the lips of the Christians are the effect of madness. That this explanation was only

too likely to suggest itself is evident from the readiness with which some of the bystanders on the day of Pentecost accused the apostles of intoxication. But supposing that the unbeliever aforesaid were to enter an assembly, where instead of men speaking with tongues he found prophets delivering their message, it would be impossible for him to deal thus summarily and contemptuously with the sign which he would then receive. 'He is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest' (*v.* 24). One after another of the little company into which he has made his way will speak with a message direct to the heart of the listener. The arguments produced will appeal with extraordinary precision to the deepest convictions of his nature. Exhortations will be based on the moral principles in which he has the firmest faith, however often his actions may have been in flagrant contradiction with them. Argument and advice will be mysteriously and inexplicably adapted to the circumstances of his particular case. And, what is even more extraordinary, some of the speakers will reveal a knowledge of the secret things of his life. Under influences such as these he will feel it impossible to deny the present operation of some supernatural power; he will be completely overcome by the impression produced upon him. 'Falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth' (*v.* 25).

Taking the facts as they are described by the apostle, we may ask how they would appear to an observer regarding them from the psychological point of view, and ignoring the underlying religious significance. Undoubtedly the psychologist would recognize here a remarkable instance of a class of phenomena known

generically by the name of telepathy. As we have already noticed in connexion with the prophecy of the Old Testament, recent investigations have proved the possibility of a mode of communication between mind and mind independent of the normal conditions of sense perception. Ignorant as we are of the manner in which the communication takes place, the fact is beyond dispute. Hence, what is specially remarkable in the case described by S. Paul is not the fact of thought-transference in itself, but the frequency of the phenomenon, the number of the people who were able to exercise the power, and the detailed character and correctness of the communications. That a considerable proportion of the men who composed the little Christian community should have possessed the faculty,—and S. Paul's words seem to suggest as much,—that they should have been able to exhibit it repeatedly under similar conditions when the occasion arose, and that they should have attained a high degree of accuracy in its use, are very remarkable circumstances calling for some special explanation. That explanation we find in the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Christian congregation.

It is an interesting fact that the point selected by S. Paul as most characteristic of the prophetic endowment should be precisely that capacity for reading the thoughts of others which we saw to be one of the significant peculiarities of the Old Testament prophet. The more detailed information which we have derived from S. Paul's account of the phenomenon serves to confirm the hypothesis then suggested. The capacity to discover the thoughts of others arises out of a faculty natural to man, though as yet manifesting itself in very few individuals, and in them exhibiting only

a partial development compared with what hereafter may be possible. The Spirit of God works upon this material as a basis. It heightens the power, increasing its intensity and its accuracy. It consecrates it to use in the service of God, by making it effective for the edification of man. Such divine action is only one illustration of the working of a far-reaching principle. The supernatural is neither contrary to nature, nor yet so far above nature as to be out of touch with it. It is the raising of the natural on to the level of the spiritual, where only it can find the sphere of its true development, and attain unto perfection. Man's psychic powers, as indeed all his other powers, remain aimless, undeveloped, and ineffective until they are consciously brought under the influence of their Creator. Only then will they manifest the measure of their latent possibilities.

Did not the Corinthian prophets, in reading the secrets of a stranger's heart, exhibit the partial working of a faculty which our Lord Himself possessed in its completeness? In His conversation with the Samaritan woman He gave precisely such a sign as S. Paul describes. The secrets of her heart were made manifest by Him. It is interesting to observe how she immediately draws the conclusion that the man with whom she is speaking must certainly be a prophet (John iv. 19). Hence that narrative, no less than this passage from S. Paul, illustrates the close connexion between prophecy and the power to penetrate into the recesses of personality. If we may hazard the conjecture, perhaps this wonderful faculty arises from a supernatural intensification of that power of sympathetic insight, which always exhibits itself most clearly when the Spirit of Love rules in the hearts of men.



We pass on to ask how far it is possible to determine the degree of control which the prophet exercised over his spiritual gift. In this respect also there is a marked superiority of prophecy over tongues. We have seen reason to think that the only alternative which presented itself to the person inspired with a tongue was whether he should entirely hold his peace, or should let himself go, and resign himself altogether to the strong tide of his religious emotion. With the prophet it was otherwise. He was always able to control himself. He could not, of course, summon at will the breath of inspiration. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth.' But even when that power was upon him in its fullness he never lost his liberty of discretion between speech and silence. Unlike the speaker with tongues, he could at any moment of his discourse master his strong excitement and hold his peace. 'Let the prophets speak by two or three, and let the others discern. But if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence' (*vv.* 29, 30). Not only could a prophet of his own free action bring his message to an end, but he was bound to do so in the event of receiving from another an intimation that he also had a revelation to communicate.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE SPIRITS OF THE PROPHETS

‘THE spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets ; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace ; as in all the churches of the saints ’ (xiv. 32, 33). In these words S. Paul brings to a close his illuminating discussion of Christian prophecy. But the phrase is difficult and will be differently understood, according as the prophets to whom the spirits belong are identified with or distinguished from the prophets to whom the spirits are subject. In the former case the words convey an explicit statement of the principle underlying S. Paul’s whole conception of the nature of prophetic inspiration. It is a last strong appeal to the sense of responsibility, of which the prophets ought to be conscious. The apostle would have them remember that the spiritual influence which they feel moving so strongly within them is nevertheless in the last resort under their command. It is to be their servant not their master. As it is their duty to control it, so have they the power to do so if they will. In the latter case the meaning is supposed to be that ‘ the spiritual influences acting upon one are subject, and bound to submit themselves, to others who are moved by the like ’.<sup>1</sup> This second interpretation gives a good sense, and doubtless states a true principle ; but it is open to the serious objection that if this had been S. Paul’s meaning he would surely have cast the

<sup>1</sup> H. G. Goudge, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ad loc.

sentence into the form of an exhortation. Let one prophet show deference to the rest. Whereas his words as they stand are a plain statement of fact. And it is only too obvious that the state of things in the Corinthian church was such that this mutual deference among the prophets did not exist. Its absence accounted for that confusion which it was the object of S. Paul to correct. This consideration accordingly seems decisive in favour of the view that S. Paul is not thinking of the relation between prophet and prophet, but of that between the prophet's personality and the spiritual power within him. • It is the prophets themselves to whom their spirits are subject. But what are these spirits ?

The word 'spirits' in this context has been taken to be a mere personification, so to speak, of the spiritual gifts,<sup>1</sup> or a synonym for spiritual influences not further specified.<sup>2</sup> Of these explanations the first is highly improbable. To suppose that S. Paul used the word 'spirits' when he meant spiritual gifts is to credit him with doing a violence to language beyond all reason. The second is altogether too vague. Doubtless S. Paul is referring to some kind of spiritual influence ; but the very question that awaits an answer is the nature of this influence. Is it to be regarded as personal or impersonal ? The whole tenor of the passage points to the conclusion that he is here using the word in the same sense as it bears in xii. 10, where, in his enumeration of the spiritual gifts, he mentions 'discerning of spirits'. Nor is he the only New Testament writer who refers to the necessity of distinguishing between spirit and spirit. Thus S. John writes, in a passage

<sup>1</sup> Stanley, *Epistles of S. Paul to the Corinthians*.

<sup>2</sup> Goudge, *Lib. cit.*

which presents several most interesting points of contact with S. Paul, 'Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit which confesseth not Jesus is not of God' (1 John iv. 1 ff). In S. John's Epistle, as in S. Paul's, the problem under discussion is how to distinguish between true and false inspiration. Moreover, both apostles suggest the same test, viz. confession of the Incarnation by the spirit.<sup>1</sup> (Cf. 1 Cor. xii. 3.) We need not hesitate, therefore, to assume that they are using the word 'spirits' in the same sense. And surely the plain meaning of the word in both the contexts where it stands is nothing more nor less than a designation of personal spiritual beings, members of those other orders of creatures which, as well as ourselves, have their part to play in the great scheme of God's universe. This explanation is supported by S. John's immediately following reference to false prophets, which recalls the famous apologue of Micaiah, and his description of the lying spirit that entered into the false prophets of the King of Israel (1 Kings xxii). It is remarkable that commentators on the Epistle to the Corinthians should have been shy of admitting this explanation. Dr. Westcott, however, has no such scruple. 'There are,' he writes, 'many spiritual powers active among men, and our first impulse leads us to believe and obey them. They evidently represent that which is not of sight. But some of these are evil influences belonging to the unseen order. They come to us under specious forms of ambition, power,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 190 f.

honour, knowledge, as distinguished from earthly sensual enjoyments. All such spirits are partial revelations of the one spirit of evil which become, so to speak, embodied in men.'<sup>1</sup> There is much to recommend the acceptance of this obvious meaning of the word 'spirits'. It is in entire harmony with the point of view of New Testament writers, for whom the world was peopled with spiritual agencies, demoniac and angelic. It is consistent with S. Paul's own description of the Christian life as a conflict maintained in alliance with and in opposition to spiritual powers. On the one hand are the forces of evil omen, the principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph. vi. 12). On the other hand are the angelic orders, who watch the spiritual struggles of man as a spectacle (1 Cor. iv. 9), and who, in the words of another writer, are sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation (Heb. i. 14). That S. Paul should have viewed the conflict and opposition between true and false inspiration as part of the great struggle between spiritual powers of antagonistic types is, therefore, not in the least improbable. And the recognition of the fact enables us to assign the natural meaning to his words in the passage before us. The spirits which are subject to the prophets are those beings of the unseen order with whom the prophets in their moments of inspiration are in communication. These also are the spirits which needed to be discerned or distinguished by means of the special gift of the Holy Ghost designed for that purpose. Since the same or similar diversities of moral character prevail among these beings as among men, it is unsafe

<sup>1</sup> B. F. Westcott, *The Epistles of S. John*, ad loc.



to accept any message from them until the nature of the source from which it comes has been ascertained. It is in the highest degree dangerous to ignore the advice, 'Prove the spirits, whether they are of God.'

But before proceeding to ask what means are at man's disposal for distinguishing between good and bad spirits, we must pause to consider how this representation of prophetic inspiration as dependent upon communication with spiritual beings, harmonizes with what we have said as to the operation in prophecy of man's subconscious self and natural psychic faculties. As a matter of fact the two views are not contrary but complementary to one another. There is no alternative in the case, as though prophecy must needs be due either to intercourse with spiritual beings, or to the action of the subconsciousness. On the contrary, the hypothesis here presented is that prophecy, or rather certain manifestations of the power of prophecy, will arise out of such intercourse rendered possible by the operation of these subconscious faculties. The suggestion emanating from some spirit serves, so to speak, as the material which is received and worked upon by the man's self, so that he becomes responsible for the final result. That the subconscious self is, in fact, the medium by which we come in contact with the spiritual forces surrounding us is the opinion of certain experts who speak with authority on the subject. Witness the following quotation from Professor James. 'Let me then propose, as an hypothesis, that whatever it may be on its farther side, the "more" with which in our religious experience we feel ourselves connected is, on its hither side, the subconscious continuation of our conscious life. Starting thus with a recognized psychological fact as our basis, we seem to preserve

a contact with "science" which the ordinary theologian lacks. At the same time the theologian's contention that the religious man is moved by an external power is vindicated, for it is one of the peculiarities of invasions from the subconscious region to take on objective appearances, and to suggest to the Subject an external control.'<sup>1</sup> In this passage some of the underlying assumptions are such as could not be admitted without considerable reservations. But there is no reason why we should not accept Professor James's suggestion as to the part played by the subconscious self as intermediary between the soul and the spiritual world, however much we demur to the faintness of the recognition which he accords to the reality of the something outside ourselves. At any rate, it seems clear that by the apostle these external influences are described as spirits. But in so speaking was he giving his own deliberate personal conviction? Or was he only adopting for purposes of convenience the ordinary expressions current in the Christian world? We must at least grant the possibility of the second alternative. It has been pointed out in an exceedingly interesting passage by Dr. Sanday, how our Lord Himself was ready to cast His teaching into symbolical forms provided by the common modes of speech familiarly used by those to whom He addressed Himself. For example, He has no scruple in thus using the conceptions of demonology prevalent in the Palestine of His day (Matt. xii. 43-45).<sup>2</sup> We must, therefore, allow that S. Paul may conceivably have been employing expressions that were in daily use without intending to give them the guarantee of his own authority.

<sup>1</sup> *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 512.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Christ in Recent Research*, p. 27.

On the other hand, there are not lacking allusions in his writings which prove beyond dispute that the spirit world, with its opposing armies of good and evil forces, bulked large in his imagination. With such a conception of the universe the reference to spirits in relation to prophecy falls quite naturally into place. What, perhaps, is most remarkable is that he makes so comparatively little of the contact of the prophet with the spiritual world. And he rejects with unmistakable clearness the notion that men are helpless to resist the influence of these superhuman beings. It is man who really occupies the position of superiority. 'The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.'

We return to the consideration of the phenomena of prophecy in the Corinthian Church. The process was not completed with the delivery of the message by the prophet. For when that was ended there remained the need of discrimination. 'Let the prophets speak by two or three ; and let the others discern.' The last words contain an obvious reference to the special gift of discerning of spirits, mentioned in chap. xii. 10. Just as tongues were of little value apart from interpretation, so prophecy failed of its object if not supplemented by the action of the corresponding gift of discrimination. It is not immediately obvious to whom reference is made by the expression 'the others'. S. Paul may mean the other prophets, or the other Christians present in the congregation. The distinction which obviously existed between the gift of prophecy and the gift of discrimination is decidedly against the first of these two alternatives. Perhaps S. Paul hoped that all might share to some extent in the possession of the gift of discrimination, just as he desired that they might 'all prophesy' (xiv. 31). But

whoever 'the others' referred to may have been, the main point is evident. The authentication of prophecy depended upon the action of this further gift, and upon its united exercise by a number of people. And this fact is of cardinal importance with regard to the elucidation of S. Paul's theory of the nature of prophetic inspiration. For it proves that he did not think of the prophetic message as of something beyond all criticism. Nor does he suggest that when once a man has been discovered to be a prophet, henceforward all his prophecies are to be accepted with unqualified deference as of divine authority. He was perfectly aware of the possibility, and even of the likelihood, that in the messages delivered by the prophets there should be an admixture of error, which it was precisely the function of criticism to detect and to correct. Not, of course, that he would accuse the Christian prophets of any conscious wish to deceive their fellow Christians, but the nature of their gift of inspiration did not render them immune from any risk of error. It left them exposed to the assaults of unholy spirits, to the temptations of self-deceit and insincerity, from which they needed to be protected by the joint action of the community to which they belonged. It is not difficult to see how imperatively necessary was the safeguard thus introduced. Had everything which the prophets declared on the supposed authority of the Spirit been forthwith accepted by the Church at the valuation which they themselves put upon it, a condition of dire confusion would have inevitably ensued. The faith of the Church would have been at the mercy of the eccentricities of individual belief. Variations, inconsistencies, and contradictions would have abounded, all equally claiming the authority of prophetic inspiration.

It is no imaginary picture, for such was actually the result produced when, in a later century, the Montanists preferred to the historic faith of the Church the random revelations of their prophetesses. Against this danger S. Paul makes due provision, not by repudiating all idea of a present continuous inspiration, but by inculcating a fearless confidence in the action of the complementary gift of discrimination. Instead of relegating all prophetic inspiration to the past, as though it were already a closed book, he insisted on the ability of the Church to distinguish between true and false revelations. He believed in the value of criticism, provided that the power to criticize were recognized as coming from the same Spirit who was the author of true prophecy. It was not, therefore, the mere criticism of common sense to which the apostle made his appeal; he would have had scant sympathy indeed with those who would seek to determine the true essence of religion by means of a vote of the majority. The critic of inspiration needs himself to be inspired no less than the prophet, and pronounces his verdict not on the strength of his own learning and acumen, but as the result of a process of thought directed from first to last by the Holy Spirit. Thus the problem of discrimination between true and false spirits is solved not by any mechanical interposition of divine omniscience, but because the Spirit is present guiding man to a right use of his critical faculties. In the action of the gift of discernment there is no more any substitution of divine action for human than there is in that of government, of wisdom, of knowledge, of prophecy.

Perhaps we may wonder what were the data on which those endowed with the gift of discernment reached their conclusions. One particular criterion is specially



singled out for mention by S. Paul at the opening of this section of his Epistle. 'Ye know that when ye were Gentiles ye were led away unto those dumb idols, howsoever ye might be led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking in the Spirit of God saith, Jesus is anathema; and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit (chap. xii. 2, 3). The moment that S. Paul turned his thoughts to the subject of the spiritual gifts he was aware of a question which his Corinthian converts desired him to answer. Probably, indeed, it was one which they had actually communicated to him with a request for his direction. In spite of the pride which they felt in the manifestations of inspired speaking in their assemblies, they were perplexed with the difficulty of distinguishing between true and false inspiration. Subsequently, as we have seen, S. Paul proceeded to a full discussion of the principles which should determine the use of spiritual gifts in all their variety; but before doing so he gave a plain and definite answer to their question. Confession of the truth of the Incarnation by the inspired speaker on the one hand, a blasphemous denial of that truth on the other, would enable them to recognize who was, or was not, controlled by the Spirit of God. There is no ambiguity whatever in the language; the apostle's meaning is unmistakable. And yet it is impossible not to wonder at the nature of the test proposed. It seems mechanical and external, and appears to leave out of account the possibility of a conventional or even hypocritical use of the formula, Jesus is Lord. The difficulty is a real one, but the examination which we have made into the nature of the inspirational speaking among the Corinthians will help us to a probable solution.

The passage in question is a further confirmation of the hypothesis that a man when prophesying was not in his normal condition, but was influenced by some external control, which seemed to put thoughts into his heart and words into his mouth. Although as a matter of fact the prophet could always control himself by a vigorous effort of will, yet it is evident that he did not always make that effort, but allowed himself to be completely carried away by his excitement. Only in view of this fact can we understand the possibility of the occurrence of the expression, 'Jesus is anathema.' That a Christian convert addressing a Christian congregation should have consciously and deliberately made use of such blasphemous words is inconceivable. Yet it is plain from S. Paul's reference that they were sometimes heard in an alleged prophetic utterance. Evidently they must have been spoken in the course of an address given in trance, when the normal consciousness of the speaker was in abeyance. So used they were an indication that the influence which controlled the trance was unholy, as the use of the opposite expression, 'Jesus is Lord,' was under the same conditions a witness to the presence of the Holy Spirit.

It may be felt that there is more difficulty about accepting the latter expression as evidence of the holiness of the influence directing the speaker's utterance, than there is about inferring its unholiness from the words of blasphemy. For why should not a man, even in a condition of trance, be guilty of using the holiest phrases without any corresponding reality of feeling in his heart? The possibility of insincerity is patent. But we must remember that S. Paul does not profess to give a general criterion by which at all times and in all places a truly inspired utterance might be

distinguished from its counterfeit. Had that been his intention, he could not have attached so much importance to the occurrence of a phrase. His direction must be considered in relation to the particular conditions obtaining at Corinth at that time. And if we are to understand the grounds of his advice we must endeavour to realize what those circumstances were so far as they affect this psychological problem. The essential feature of the position is indicated in the words, 'When ye were Gentiles ye were led away unto those dumb idols, howsoever ye might be led.' The crux of the whole passage, and therefore presumably also the key to its interpretation, lies in the discovery of the connexion of these words with what follows. As is frequently the case in S. Paul's writings, many of the links in the chain are wanting, and must needs be supplied by conjecture. Perhaps we may venture to reconstruct his argument as follows: Only a short time before these Corinthian converts had been under the control of very different impulses from those which now swayed them. From their previous experience they knew how man's spirit can apparently be swept along by irresistible forces. In the days of their idolatry these forces had set in the direction of folly and wickedness. But now as Christians they had been brought under the power of the Holy Ghost. The two sets of influences, the heathen and the Christian, were diametrically opposed to one another, and the respective periods of their action were sharply sundered by the crisis of conversion. In his normal state a Christian convert would naturally submit himself to the Christian influences; but in the abnormal trance-state it was possible that his mind might slip back under the control of forces belonging to the old unregenerate days. In

the event of such a reversion the utterances of the speaker would not be expressive of Christian ideas and Christian hopes. He would not be speaking by the Spirit of God. Language of antipathy to our Lord coming from the lips of a speaker in trance would be an easily recognizable sign that he was under the domination of the old heathen conceptions. If, on the other hand, he used Christian terms of adoration towards our Lord, it was to be inferred that the Christian influences were in the ascendant, and that therefore the Holy Ghost was with him. But S. Paul does not say that every word which came from one speaking in the Holy Spirit was to be accepted as though it were guaranteed by divine authority. He neither says so, nor is there any reason to think that the Corinthians would have so understood him. On the contrary, the whole tenor of what he subsequently has to say about prophecy and the gift of discerning of spirits shows that even those addresses in which the formula, Jesus is Lord, occurred needed to be subjected to the test of criticism. And we may feel certain that the gift of discrimination carried with it something more than the power to decide the crude alternative whether a man were speaking under the influence of the Holy Ghost or of an evil spirit. The process of criticism was a process of judgement, a sifting out of that which was good and true from that which was worthless or objectionable. In accomplishing this task it would be impossible to depend solely upon that one mark which S. Paul, before entering upon his detailed examination of the whole matter, had mentioned briefly in passing. If nothing more was necessary than to listen whether certain words occurred in a man's discourse, what can have been the purpose of the special gift of discrimination? This external test

could be equally well applied by any one who would give his careful attention to what was being said. It was clearly, therefore, the prophetic utterances containing these orthodox phrases which the discriminators passed under review, accepting and rejecting in accordance with the dictates of their special inspired gift of discernment. And undoubtedly this gift, like all others of the same class, needed to be used intelligently and conscientiously. It was no mechanical means for determining what was truth and what was not. Any such supposition is in direct contradiction with all that we know as to the working of God upon the human soul.

Thus the apostle's theory of inspiration, as it is brought out point by point in his discussion of the practical question of the treatment of the spiritual gifts, involves no blind surrender or unconditional submission on man's part to an unknown spiritual power. He is as far from countenancing this course as he is from suggesting that man can discover for himself spiritual truth apart from the continuous guidance of the Holy Spirit. The divine direction must be followed freely, intelligently, and with open eyes. Above all—and this surely is the very heart of the apostolic doctrine of inspiration—the recognition and appropriation of the heavenly leading exceeds the powers of any one individual. It is a task only possible for the Body, the Church, and one which she can only accomplish because she is the home of the Holy Spirit. The Church possesses in her prophets men capable of hearing messages from on high, in her discerners of spirits men capable of distinguishing such messages from any base imitation of the same. These men are the Church's instruments, and if she uses them aright she will be guided by a sure and unerring instinct



in the selection of that which is true and of permanent value in the deliverances of her prophets. Thus we learn from S. Paul how the answer to the difficulty of distinguishing between what is truly inspired and what is either not at all or only partly inspired is to be found in a fuller appreciation of the doctrine of the common life of the Church, and of her varied equipment in the different gifts of her members for the general edification. The prophet standing alone would be an unsafe guide. For no man, however much inspired, is *ipso facto* and in himself infallible. But the Church, wherein are to be found not only prophets, but also the discerners of spirits, and where both prophet and discerners discharge their respective functions humbly, honestly, and responsibly, as beneath the eye of God, is prepared to advance securely in heavenly wisdom and in the knowledge of divine truth.





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